The Thesis Committee for Aaron Christopher Delgaty

Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

Fragile Families:
Kinship and Contention in a Community Temple

APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor:

John W. Traphagan

Nancy K. Stalker

Fragile Families:
Kinship and Contention in a Community Temple

by

Aaron Christopher Delgaty, B.A.

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For Lauren

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Abstract

Fragile Families:
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Aaron Christopher Delgaty, M.A.

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Supervisor: John W. Traphagan

Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Ishimura, a small town in Japan's rural northeastern Iwate Prefecture during the summer of 2012, this thesis pursues two objectives. (1) Building on observations found in recent Western scholarship on the nature of Japanese religious institutions (Covell 2005, Rowe 2011), this thesis contends that Japanese Buddhist temples operating in close-knit rural communities are, in addition to religious and social spaces, inherently domestic spaces characterized by familial networks that link the temple to the parish through real and imagined kinship relations. Family networks also define the internal structuring of temple leadership, consisting of actual nuclear or multigenerational families that live and work at the heart of a community temple. Importantly, these temple families directly influence the community perception of the temple as a religious and social institution. In short, this thesis contends that family defines and families represent community temples. This thesis demonstrates the domestic and familial characteristics of community temples by examining the families at the center of Ishimura's three Buddhist institutions, Kamidera, Shimodera, and Nakadera. (2) This thesis then turns to explore the contentious nature of community temples as domestic spaces. Specifically, this thesis contends that the familial dynamics that define temple leadership carry potentially "disruptive, disintegrative, and psychologically disturbing" ramifications for temple leadership and parish families. Drawing on the case of Tatsu, the troubled and troublesome vice

priest of Nakadera, this thesis seeks to understand how the failed succession of a head priest can generate dysfunction across the broader familial networks that constitute a community temple. The case of Tatsu and Nakadera ultimately illuminates the vulnerabilities inherent to community temples as family-mediated, domestic institutions.

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INTRODUCTION: LEAVING NAKADERA

My first foray into field research nearly ended when I was thrown out of a Zen temple. I had come to Ishimura, a rural town in Japan's northern Iwate Prefecture, during the summer of 2012 in order to investigate the disaster relief efforts of small rural Buddhist temples in response to the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami that devastated the Tōhoku coastline. My approach involved regularly volunteering at a local temple, conducting informal interviews with leadership and volunteers while we swept hallways, weeded gardens, and managed internal records. I hoped to learn what relief efforts this institution had offered over the past year, and what meanings these efforts carried for those who performed them. What I found was a disgruntled Vice Priest who became increasingly agitated with my presence at his temple. I was naïve and wrapped up in my questions, and did not notice his mounting tension until it was too late. On a hazy Tuesday afternoon in late July, after nearly two months of daily research at Nakadera Temple, Vice-Priest Tatsu[1] reached his breaking point. Shouting and gesturing heatedly, Tatsu interrupted my interview with another regular temple volunteer to inform me that I was no longer welcome at the temple because my research was evidently "not about Buddhism" (*Bukkyō janai*). Why, he asked, if I was concerned with Buddhism, was I questioning lay members, observing daily rituals, and participating in temple activities, when he, a trained cleric, was just down the hall? Tatsu, it seemed to me in the moment, had misunderstood the focus of my research, something I thought I had made clear over the past two months. I tried to explain to him my interest in the temple as a social institution, but he dismissed my pleas. If my interest was not in theology, I

[1] "Tatsu," like all other proper names found in this study, is a pseudonym. Due to the close-knit nature of the communities and the sensitive information of the information addressed in this study, names of informants, institutions, and locations have been altered to protect anonymity.

should leave. Shooing me out of the temple and thrusting his index finger into my face, he added that my research and professional ambitions were "impossible" (*muri*).

I was simultaneously furious and disheartened as I walked through the temple's graveyard and back to my inn. I had invested nearly two months into Tatsu's family and temple, cleaning the grounds daily and assisting with special events. This volunteer work had of course been an avenue to interviews and participant observation, but I felt I had made myself more than just an ongoing nuisance. I was also depressed, not only because of Tatsu's harsh critique of my character and ability, but also because I thought the perspectives and interpretations I had collected from those I encountered day-to-day at the Zen temple, and the observations I had made of the daily activities of this intuition, were Buddhism. As my frustration subsided, my curiosity grew. Spurred on by my research advisor who, while sympathetic to my initial distress, saw my predicament as anthropologically fascinating, I began to formulate new research questions: What was occurring within Nakadera specifically and institutionalized Japanese Buddhism broadly that had allowed this to happen? How had my approaches to the temple and its people contributed to this outcome?

These musings were interrupted when I received a text message the morning following Tatsu's outburst from head priest Daizō and his wife Miho (Tatsu's supervisors and parents-in-law) asking me to come to Nakadera that evening. I took the long way to the temple, my anxiety competing with my curiosity. At Nakadera, Daizō and Miho apologized on Tatsu's behalf, blaming the fiasco on their son-in-law's ego and immaturity. As punishment for the trouble he had caused both me and Nakadera's reputation (rumor of indiscretion travels fast in a small town), Daizō had ordered Tatsu to take a two-week furlough from the temple in order to reflect on his behavior. In the meantime, they hoped I would return to the temple in order to continue

my research (and daily volunteer work). I thanked Daizō and Miho for their kindness and their hospitality, but declined their invitation. Continuing my daily presence at the temple did not seem like a constructive course of action for me, or for the family at its center. I felt the interpersonal damage between Tatsu and me was irreparable; I did not believe two weeks of reflection of either side would mend the dysfunction. I explained my feelings to Daizō and Miho, which they respected. I left Nakadera Temple around midnight, ultimately parting on friendly terms with the Nakadera family (sans Tatsu), but still feeling unsettled by the whole experience. On my way home, I returned to a familiar question: what now?

After two days of deliberating in my small *tatami*-mat room, ordering take-out, watching bad movies on my phone, and neglecting to shave, I brushed myself off and began to cast about the small town in search of answers to my new questions. My field method going forward consisted of "hanging out"[2] at the lone coffee shop/stationary store in town, a friendly establishment owned and frequented by Nakadera parish (*danka*) members. Despite the kerfuffle with Tatsu, my connections to the people of Nakadera and Ishimura remained strong, and the temple leadership, volunteers, and members I bumped into outside the temple were willing to meet for coffee as their schedules allowed. I was not surprised that many had already heard of my encounter with Tatsu (secrets were rare in Ishimura), but I was surprised that not one of the leadership members or regular volunteers were surprised that this happened. Tatsu's combative affect and aggressive behavior were ostensibly common knowledge; a number of regular visitors had incurred Tatsu's wrath for a perceived slight over his four-year tenure, and rumors of these incidents had permeated Nakadera's parish and broader community. Tatsu, it seems, was an infamous skeleton in Nakadera's closet.

[2] See Matthews 2011, pg 51

What surprised me even more than Tatsu's infamy was the apparent solidarity among my informants and me that this shared knowledge and experience generated, solidarity that directly influenced the nature of my interviews with Nakadera members. Post-Tatsu crisis interviews were significantly more revealing in terms of the information and personal opinion contained in informant testimony. These discussions revolved around Tatsu's erratic behavior, with informants citing notable negative examples of his behavior, offering possible origins for his peculiar affect, and lamenting the impact of Tatsu on his new family. My questions were aimed, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, at understanding how, as a Buddhist priest in a small community, Tatsu was able to behave the way he did, in what ways were his behavior impacting Nakadera as a religious and social institution, and, ultimately, what were the potential paths forward for Nakadera. While some critiqued my interest in the institution itself as "strange" (*hen*) or "funny" (*okashii*), informants generally took my interest seriously and saw the interviews at the coffee shop, at their homes, or in their cars as an opportunity to speak their minds about a variety of subjects and opinions related (in varying degrees) to Buddhism, Nakadera temple, and its family.

Dysfunction as a Starting Point

Geertz observed that the tendency among anthropologists approaching religion "has been consistently to stress the harmonizing, integrating, and psychologically supportive aspects of religious patterns rather than the disruptive, disintegrative, and psychologically disturbing aspects; to demonstrate the manner in which religion preserves social and psychological structure rather than the manner in which is destroys or transforms it" (1957, 143). Geertz held that an understanding of how religion "helps" constitutes only half of a complete analysis on how religion informs and reflects social, political, and cultural dynamics. How religious beliefs,

practices, and conventions "hurt" can be equally revealing. However, nearly six decades later, Geertz's observation still holds largely true for the Western study of Japanese religion.

Early anthropological and historical approaches to Japanese religion focused on how these traditions informed culture and motivated communities toward common goals (Benedict 1946, Bellah 1957). While Kawano (2005) has given more recent attention to the power of ritual in establishing social order, contemporary studies have turned more to how Japanese use their flexible religiosity to affectively navigate daily live and pursue individual and shared concerns. Ian Reader and George Tanabe (1998) assert a central dynamic within this syncretic tradition that links religious rituals and devotional practices to the pursuit and acquisition of *genze riyaku,* or "worldly benefits" (2). These worldly benefits can include (but are not limited to) recovery from sickness, success in business or education, protection while driving, and auspicious afterlives. However, Reader and Tanabe argue that, whatever the particular worldly benefit may be, all are ultimately tied to obtaining peace of mind (21-2). Drawing on extensive ethnographic data taken from rural villages in Japan's northern countryside, John Traphagan tempers Reader and Tanabe's broad analysis into a "practice of concern," a practice-oriented host of rituals, sacred and mundane, that one does in order to mitigate the anxiety associated with suffering and the fear of the unknown (2004). Japanese use religious practice to address their own day-to-day concerns, and to express concern for others. Be it donating money to a temple or shrine to cure one's backache, or purchasing an amulet for a daughter's success on a high-school entrance exam, Japanese religious practice is intricately wrapped up in confronting and managing hardship.

By foregrounding the utility and adaptability of religious practice in response to idiosyncratic concerns, Reader, Tanabe, and Traphagan suggest a fundamental paradigm for the Japanese understanding of religion. Rather than privileging an overarching orthodoxy and

orthopraxy, religion exists as a loose collection of common concepts (e.g. detachment, attainment of *nirvana*) and practices (e.g. meditation, prayer, donations) that Japanese individuals and groups direct toward individual or shared objectives, be they abating anxieties or pursuing success. This realization echoes (although imperfectly) Steven Collins' assertion of the *pali imaginaire,* a set of core axioms, concerns, and concepts pervasive in the Theravada Buddhist textual canon and common to South and Southeast Asian Buddhist civilizations that serves as a platform for individual interpretation (1997). Religious elements and patterns, be they South Asian or Japanese, are constantly mediated by their social, cultural, and temporal contexts. Furthermore, as McDaniel (2011) argues of contemporary Thai Buddhism (2011), Japanese religion is subject to the individual or collective's ability and authority to contradict itself, to change its mind, to simultaneously hold conflicting beliefs, to ignore factual and historical evidence, to form interpretations based on rumor and emotion, and to draw from (or ignore) a wide variety of theological, philosophical, and political sources to frame and inform practice and meaning.

More recent anthropological studies have focused on the potential of Japanese religion to amend and reconfigure in response to changing cultural interests and socio-economic conditions. Ozawa-de Silva (2006) examines the recent innovation of Naikan, a therapeutic process that fuses Zen meditation and philosophy with Freudian psychoanalysis and speaks to growing Japanese interest in counseling psychology. Kawano (2010) observes that traditional Buddhist funerary practices have been adapted in recent decades in a variety of ways by contemporary Japanese to accommodate changing family structures and financial considerations. For these reasons, more geographically convenient and cost-effective practices like ash scattering have been integrated into existing Buddhist funeral services, or replaced them altogether. Kawano's

approach is also significant in that it emphasizes the agency of individuals to construct personally meaningful and practical forms of religious participation. Rowe (2011) demonstrates that Buddhist temples have adapted their funeral practices to address changing kinship structures by offering additional mortuary services that cater to nuclear families and individuals.

While these studies have all provided valuable information on the form and individual, social, and cultural function of Japanese religion, and have indeed addressed Geertz's call for studies that examine religious change and adaptation, they have all generally foregrounded the way in which these practices have adapted to preserve social order and how these adaptations have benefited practitioners. This is not to say that previous studies have not been conscious of potential contention; rather, contention was not their central project. The lone exception seems to be Helen Hardacre's (1997) examination of *mizuko kuyō,* ritual services for deceased and aborted children, which focuses on the profiteering of Buddhist temples capitalizing on the guilt and anxiety of grieving mothers.[3] This thesis aims to add to this minority, offering an analysis of an aspect of Japanese Buddhist temples that foregrounds dysfunction and distress.

The objectives of this thesis are two fold. (1) Building on observations found in recent Western scholarship on the nature of Japanese religious institutions (Covell 2005, Rowe 2011), this thesis contends that Japanese Buddhist temples operating in close-knit rural communities are, in addition to religious and social spaces, inherently domestic spaces characterized by familial networks that link the temple to the parish through real and imagined kinship relations. Family networks also define the internal structuring of temple leadership, consisting of actual

[3] Interestingly, anthropologists have paid considerable attention to dysfunction and contention generated by religious doctrine and practice in Buddhist communities outside of Japan (Anderson 2012, Holt 2009, Scott 2009, Southwold 1983). A particularly notable example is Alan Klima's *The Funeral Casino* (2002), which examines the intersections of Thai Buddhist funerary practices, gambling, and the violence of Thailand's pro-democracy movement during the 1990's.

nuclear or multigenerational families that live and work at the heart of a community temple. Importantly, these temple families directly influence the community perception of the temple as a religious and social institution. In short, this thesis contends that family defines and families represent community temples. (2) This thesis then turns to explore the contentious nature of community temples as domestic spaces. Specifically, this thesis contends that the familial dynamics that define temple leadership carry potentially "disruptive, disintegrative, and psychologically disturbing" ramifications for temple leadership and parish families. Drawing on the case of Nakadera and Tatsu, this thesis seeks to understand how the failed succession of a head priest can generate dysfunction across the broader familial networks that constitute a community temple. Nakadera's struggles with Tatsu ultimately illuminate the vulnerabilities inherent to community temples as family-mediated, domestic institutions.

This argument unfolds over two chapters. Chapter one begins with a close ethnographic approach to Ishimura, paying particular attention to the social conditions, economic challenges, and interpersonal dynamics that inform this troubled place. Understanding Ishimura is necessary for appreciating the context in which these Ishimura's three Buddhist temples, Kamidera, Shimodera, and Nakadera, operate. This chapter then offers a brief biography of Kamidera, Shimodera, and Nakadera, focusing on the families that define each temple as a religious, social, and domestic institution. Particular attention is given to Nakadera and its multigenerational family, the central field site and informants for this study. A biographical approach to these institutions allows for community temples to be recognized as domestic spaces composed of and structured around real and imagined family networks. Chapter 2 shifts to examining the dysfunction that can occur at the heart of a community temple. Tatsu, the troubled and troublesome vice priest of Nakadera, serves as the principle case study in this analysis. By

expanding Tatsu's biography to examine his life before and at Nakadera, his opinions and perceptions regarding Ishimura, Nakadera, and his family, and his ambitions and anxiety surrounding his position as the heir to the Nakadera temple and the Nakadera family, this chapter will reveal Tatsu as a complex character whose internal and interpersonal dysfunction generates contention throughout Nakadera. The case of Tatsu ultimately reveals the risks inherent in familial succession narrowly, and in the domestic nature of community temples broadly.

CHAPTER ONE: FIELD SITES AND FAMILY SPACES

Ishimura was an arbitrary choice. When I had asked a former Japanese professor in the fall of 2011 if he personally knew of any temples in northern Japan, he listed three. I sent letters to all three priests asking if they would be willing to be studied for a period of three months by an American graduate student, and only Nakadera Temple in Ishimura responded. My professor had hosted Miho and several of her friends when they visited Michigan in the 1980's and they, in Japanese fashion, were looking to reciprocate. When I stepped off the bullet train in June of 2012, I was struck by how familiar and different Ishimura was. Ishimura was familiar in that it resembled my hometown, a small, verdant, and sleepy tourist town in western Michigan. Instead of a lake, Ishimura had mountains, and instead of beaches, Ishimura had hot springs. Ishimura was different in that the rural town was a far stretch from any other Japanese locale I had visited. Gone were the chain restaurants, coffee shops, and shopping malls of the towns in the central Kansai region. This was Japan's countryside.

I took up residence in a small inn on Main Street, just down the road from Ishimura's three temples. For the majority of my stay, I was the sole resident of the 20-room, traditionally constructed building. As I walked to Nakadera, which I did nearly every morning, I passed a family owned convenience store, a rice peddler, a hair salon, and a Buddhist item shop. When I went to the local café/pub, I passed a bookstore, a bakery, and a community center. The people of Ishimura had a tendency to sit outside their businesses, and we often exchanged greetings as I passed. I began to recognize these faces in other contexts. I met them frequently in restaurants and bars, but I also met them at the temple. Funerals, memorial services, and community events brought them to Nakadera just as research brought me. These residents became an important dimension of my research, providing human voices to the rituals and performances I observed.

When I asked what brought them to the temple, most visitors mentioned family; a family member had died, a family grave had to be visited, a family member invited them. Familial connections coursed through Nakadera, down the streets, and into Ishimura's communities. This chapter examines the family connections that define Ishimura and its Buddhist institutions. I begin with an examination of Ishimura Town and the many challenges it faces. I then address Ishimura's three community temples, important social, religious, and, most critically, domestic institutions. Through a biography of each temple, I demonstrate that these temples are fundamentally domestic places defined internally and externally by familial networks.

A Place Called Ishimura

"Ishimura is the *inaka* of the *inaka*" (*Ishimura wa inaka no inaka desu yo*), Jun, a 26-year-old resident of Ishimura and member of the local "Young Men's Association" (which I had also temporarily joined due to a recent lack of members), joked when I asked him to describe his hometown. Jun's hyperbolic statement, an assertion echoed by a number of young adults I spoke with, placed Ishimura, a small town (*machi*) located in Iwate prefecture, as a figurative "remote countryside" (*inaka*) within the real countryside of northern Japan's rural Tōhoku region. *Inaka* (田舎), typically rendered as "rural area" or "countryside" in English and written using Chinese characters (*kanji*) meaning "field" (田) and "houses" or "huts" (舎), is a relative term used to describe less urban areas (Traphagan 2004, 29). Among young Japanese, *inaka* also functions as an adjective nuancing the presumed "backwardness" of unsophisticated rural localities relative to Japan's more cosmopolitan cities like Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo.[1] While we secured a decorative wooden boat to a flatbed truck in preparation for Ishimura's annual Ship Burning Festival

[1] "Cowtown" is an appropriate American English cognate for expressing the image and sentiment a young Japanese references by using the term *inaka*. In fact, several of my informants who had spent time traveling in America used the term "cowtown" (in English) instead of *inaka,* something I found amusing considering Ishimura's town pride for its dairy industry.

(*funekko nagashi matsuri*), I asked Jun if he disliked Ishimura. "That's a difficult question (*muzukashii ne*)," he answered. "Ishimura is very boring (*sugoku tsumannai*). That's why I also go to Morioka [the urban capital of Morioka]. It's only 20 minutes away, and it's way more fun (*omoshiroi*). However, Ishimura can also be really convenient (*benri*). *Gyaru* ("gals")[2] love festivals (*matsuri*), and Ishimura has lots of festivals." Jun then broke off the conversation to flirt with a group of young women who had come to admire the boats.

Although Jun's reflections on Ishimura revolved around concerns of boredom and sexual conquest common to his peer group, his sentiments suggest the complicated interpersonal and socio-economic dynamics that characterize Ishimura as a "difficult" (*muzukashii*) place to live. Indeed, Ishimura faces a number of challenges including a failing agrarian and tourist-based economy, a suicide rate four times the national average, and an exodus of young people leaving Ishimura for work and education. The following examines Ishimura in relation to these difficulties in order to better understand the complicated, messy environments that Ishimura's residents occupy and in which its community temples operate.

Incorporated into a town and township during the 1950's and legally recognized as a single locality, Ishimura is actually a conglomerate of five villages (*mura*): Ishimura village, Ōmyojin, Gōshō, Nishiyama, and Ōmura. The former villages are considerably spread out, separated by a 20-minute drive on average, resulting in Ishimura and its township occupying a land area roughly the same size as Tokyo (nearly 850 square miles) despite having a population of only 18,000 people.[3] The distance between each former village also accents the uneven development of each area, with villages ranging from relatively urban to significantly rural in relation to each other. Stepping off the train in Ishimura station, one encounters the centrally

[2] A term used by young Japanese men to refer to young, attractive, and often trendy women
[3] Ishimura Town "databook" (2012)

located former Ishimura village, the most urban and densely populated area of present Ishimura.[4] Ishimura village hosts Ishimura's town hall, train station, bank, post office, supermarket, and local high school. The restaurants, shops, and inns located in the area immediately surrounding the train station and on Ishimura's "Main Street" represent Ishimura's commercial center. "Main Street" contains Ishimura's most lively pub and coffee shop, its town gift shop (which sells a variety of wooden handicrafts made by locals), and its three Buddhist temples, Kamidera, Shimodera, and Nakadera.

To the east of former Ishimura village is Ōmyojin, the second-most urban area that consists mostly of residential homes and holds the dubious distinction of having the highest number of suicides among the former villages. Ōmyojin appears to be more active in the broader community than other villages, as it hosts the majority of Ishimura's festivals. To the west is Gōsho, home to a large number of rice and mountain vegetable fields, traditional farm households, and Ishimura's retirement home. Nishiyama lies to the south, roughly a 40-minute drive from Ishimura station. Nishiyama hosts more farms, a number of quaint bed-and-breakfasts, and scenic forests. Ōmura, located further south of Nishiyama, is the most rural and sparsely populated of the five villages, and it is relatively isolated from the rest of Ishimura according to residents in other villages.[5] The area encompassing Gōsho, Nishiyama, and Ōmura also contains the vast majority of Ishimura's hot-spring resorts, Ishimura's main tourist attractions.

[4] Ishimura Town "databook" (2012)

[5] Interestingly, while many official town reports differentiate between Ishimura village, Ōmyojin, Gōsho, and Nishiyama, when compiling statistical data, they rarely distinguish Ōmura from Nishiyama. However, the distinction remained quite relevant in conversations with residents of both areas.

When conversing with someone from out-of-town, residents of Ishimura are quick to highlight the positives of their home, a place many refer to affectionately as their *furusato* ("hometown"). An introduction to Ishimura understandably begins with its ambiance and aesthetic beauty. Nestled in the shadow of Mount Iwate, residents typically describe Ishimura's sleepy atmosphere (*fuinki*) as "peaceful" (*shizuka*) and "natural" (*shizen*). Blue snow-capped mountains dominate Ishimura's skyline, and its rolling hills are covered in verdant forests. Sunshine plays across partially submerged rice patties, sparkling on the water and emphasizing the bright green of rice shoots. Residents often brag about vegetables produced in Ishimura's fields, claiming that the natural snowmelt water flowing from the nearby mountains and the abundance of sunlight during the spring and summer produce a unique and unparalleled flavor.[6] At first glance, it would be difficult to deny that Ishimura commands a particular charm. However, despite the pride they have in their home, residents recognize Ishimura as a place visibly and pervasively marked by economic, demographic, and affective decline.

Ishimura's ailing economy is apparent from the outset, as the majority of shops that line "Main Street" are shuttered, and fresh businesses are few and far between. Ishimura, like much of rural Japan, has been significantly impacted by Japan's decades-long economic recession.[7] Ishimura grapples with this recession, and also with socioeconomic difficulties particular to its local context. According to an informant working in the local school system, Ishimura's government struggles with massive overhead directly linked to the persisting divisions between the former villages. For example, despite serving its population with only one high school and one middle school, Ishimura maintains 11 elementary schools each offering grades kindergarten

[6] Although I have yet to meet someone either in or outside Japan to corroborate this, a number of residents claim that Ishimura vegetables are nationally and globally famous (*sekaiteki*).
[7] For a detailed analysis of Japan's economic recession and its potential causes, see Bayoumi 2001.

through sixth. Some of these schools, particularly those in the sparsely populated outreaches of Nishiyama and Ōmura, have a higher number of teachers than students. Officials are reluctant to downsize, for one because of the discomfort at violating social expectations concerning the security of government jobs, and second (reportedly) because grandparents want their grandchildren to be able to walk to school despite Ishimura possessing a bus system. Furthermore, Ishimura still maintains five community centers (one in each village), again because of concerns over social convention and local nostalgia.

While unnecessary government expenditure exacerbates financial difficulties in Ishimura, the anxieties of my informants revolved around the foundations of Ishimura's economy. Ishimura is primarily sustained by a combination of wet-rice and mountain vegetable agriculture and hot spring (*onsen*) resort tourism. However, both industries have fallen into deep recessions, declines that jeopardize Ishimura's economic viability and threaten to complicate the lives of its residents.

Economic Decline – Tourism

Run-down white-washed buildings, a rusting ski lift, and weathered neon signs displaying "*ōnsen*" (hot spring) represent the lingering remnants of Ishimura's once proud tourist economy. During the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), Ishimura's hot spring resorts had been so famous that they allegedly enjoyed the patronage of the shogun and his retinue. In its modern heyday, Ishimura had as many as 30 hot spring resorts, ranging from multi-story hotels to single-story family-run baths. The attraction is not difficult to understand; located in volcanically active Tōhoku, Ishimura has ready access to a plethora of natural hot springs (much preferable to artificial springs common in other regions, according to residents and visitors alike), which maintain a constant naturally high temperature and give off the distinct scent of sulfur.

I visited the largest hot spring in town, located in the basement of Ishimura's grandest hotel (the top recommended accommodation for tourists), in July after a long week of assisting Nakadera temple with a cultural exchange program (discussed later in this chapter). Miho had bought me a day pass as a token of the temple's appreciation. I was incredibly nervous, not only at the prospect of being naked in front of a host of strangers, but also because I would be fumbling through the bathing process in what I assumed would be the crowded bath befitting Ishimura's most prominent hotel. I removed my clothes and put them in a basket, took seven deep breaths (three were not enough), and opened the steam-clouded door to the bath, bracing myself for a wall of eyes. No one. Not a soul. I experienced a sudden wave of relief, followed by a wave of puzzlement. It was a Saturday night in Ishimura's most popular *ōnsen*. Where were all the tourists?

The answer to this question played out in conversations with long-time residents, innkeepers, and restaurateurs. While Ishimura had once been "world famous" (*sekaiteki*), interest in the rural town had peaked during the 1980's. Before Japan's economic bubble burst, Ishimura had been a popular hot spring and ski destination for national and international tourists alike. So strong was its reputation that it was picked during the early 80's to host an international ski tournament. Ishimura had built a luxury hotel next to the main ski slope to commemorate the occasion. Now that same building stands in disrepair, still functioning, but with a crumbling facade, dated carpet, and few guests to speak of. In many ways, the Tokyo Ishimura (the hotel's name) represents Ishimura's tourist industry broadly: peaked, still functional, but way past its prime.

However, as my informants believed, even if these tourist attractions could be revived, they would do little to mend Ishimura's wider economy. All of Ishimura's hot spring and ski

resorts are located on the outskirts of Gōsho, Nishiyama, and Ōmura, areas closer to the natural geothermal springs and mountain slopes that make these destinations potentially attractive, but all a considerable distance from Ishimura proper. Given that a tourist can drive directly to these resorts, there is little incentive to visit and support the shops and restaurants in more densely populated areas. As a result, Ishimura struggles to translate its existing (and perhaps someday profitable) tourist industry into something immediately beneficial for the majority of its permanent residents.

Economic Decline – Agriculture

I encountered a number of farmers and acquaintances of farmers while "hanging out" at Ishimura's coffee shop and pub. Farmers in particular would often stop in toward the end of the day for a cold beer and to chat with friends and co-workers. I overheard many of their conversations, and joined in when appropriate. Others I spoke with knew a friend with a farm, or had heard of a farming family struggling to make ends meet. According to these informants, Ishimura's agricultural concerns are perpetuated and intensified by three key forces. First, Ishimura farms struggle to compete with the produce prices of superstores in neighboring big cities. Urban sprawl has allowed chain supermarkets and shopping malls to creep gradually closer to Ishimura. The rock-bottom prices of these venues, the convenience of being able to simultaneously browse books, clothing, and electronics while shopping for groceries, and the accessibility of these centers via public transportation or private car pose a daunting challenge to the local farmer. In an attempt to even the playing field (or at least lessen the incline), Ishimura's grocery stores have recently begun stocking and advertising several small aisles of competitively priced locally grown produce. However, rumors have begun to circulate accusing farmers of trying to maximize their income by hypocritically advocating that others join the "buy local"

movement while the farmers themselves buy their own produce from the still (although only slightly) cheaper supermarkets.[8]

Second, even if farmers can maintain a sustainable farm, many struggle with what Jackson Bailey calls the *atotsugi mondai,* or "successor problem" (1991, 7). Ishimura farming families, like many across rural Japan, are experiencing difficulty in finding successors (*atotsugi*) to take over their farms and perpetuate the business from generation to generation. Thompson and Traphagan (2006) have noted the declining interest among young Japanese in Tōhoku in pursuing agricultural careers, even when pursuing those careers is tied to perpetuating the family business (14). The difficultly in locating willing successors is exacerbated by a third difficulty facing farming families, the *hanayome mondai* (lit. "bride problem"). Farming families that do manage to locate a successor often continue to struggle with finding eligible young women willing to marry these young farmers (Bailey 1991, 7). For farming families, a husband and wife form more than just a conjugal pair for extending the family lineage (although this is certainly important). Residents of Ishimura see the benefits of marriage in terms of additional labor and morale support. However, for both men and women, agricultural work is seen as tiresome, dirty work lacking the glamour of white-collar office work and government employment. Negative perceptions about agricultural employment are compounded by the reluctance of young people to live in rural areas, which are popularly viewed as "boring" (*tsumannai*) and "inconvenient" (*fuben*).

[8] Although I have no evidence of farmers not practicing what they preach, nor any testimonies in which a farmer admits to advertising local while buying out-of-town, the rumor enjoyed considerable credibility and debate among Ishimura's more cynical pub-goers. Conversations about the farmers typically went back and forth, featuring some rendition of, "you can't trust farmers" (*shinraisuru koto dekinai zo*), followed by "you're full of shit" (*fuzakenna yo*).

Demographic Decline

The *atotsugi* and *hanayome mondai* are fundamentally linked to greater concerns over rural depopulation in Ishimura and rural Japan broadly. While the Japanese population has gradually shifted from rural to urban spaces over the last 150 years, this trend has become more pronounced in recent decades due to Japan's nationwide population decline (Mock 2006, 25). Decreasing urban populations have generated greater demand for students and employees among educational institutions and urban companies. Attracted by greater educational and professional opportunities and disenchanted with agricultural work, local government positions, and rural small business (2006, 36), rural young people have moved en-masse to urban cities. However, school and employment are not the only factors driving youth toward urban areas, as contemporary stigmas concerning traditional family environments discourage young men and women from pursuing rural life (36-7). Mock notes that young people are fleeing rural communities because they desire more social freedom, or at least distance from the social pressures generated in close-knit rural communities (43). Traphagan observes that these pressures are felt most keenly by urban outsiders who, when brought into rural families, struggle to adapt to the mores of rural daily life while simultaneously adjusting to the idiosyncrasies of a new kinship group (2004, 51). This is more pronounced for women who, by nature of their roles as wives and daughters-in-law, are traditionally in greater proximity to the domestic sphere.[9] Thompson and Traphagan offer an explanation for this phenomenon by drawing on Bourdieu's notion of *habitus,* i.e. "the embodied cognitive structures that motivate and limit the range of possible behaviors" (1997), to suggest a fundamental dissonance between the *habiti* of younger generations and the *habiti* of older generations. While young rural Japanese associate themselves

[9] For more on women adjusting to rural life and rural families, see Kondo 1990, Rosenberger 2001, and Traphagan 2000.

and are in turn associated with modernity, taken here as the pursuit of autonomy and individual fulfillment, the *habiti* of older Japanese are linked to "traditional" values of frugality and filial piety (2006, 18).

As the *inaka* of the *inaka*, Ishimura has understandably undergone significant population decline. Over the past decade, Ishimura's total population has declined from 20,000 people to 18,000, and the most recent statistical data released by the local government suggests that the population will continue to fall. Many of Ishimura's young people leave town for high school in neighboring Morioka[10] or college in Tokyo or some other metropolis. Attracted by employment opportunities following graduation, few opt to return. Jun, who provided his opinions on Ishimura in the introduction to section, was one of the few who did. Jun's group of friends all sought local employment following graduation from high school. When I asked Jun why he returned to Ishimura, he changed the subject. However, a number of young people and young families I spoke with offered familial concerns as their primary reason for remaining in Ishimura, particularly for elderly relatives.

Ishimura's demographic decline has manifested most noticeably in a significantly "gray" population, a trend that is prevalent in rural areas throughout the Tōhoku region.[11] According to the most recent town statistics, over 46% of Ishimura residents are 60 years old or older.[12] On a sunny day, elderly residents slowly walking back and forth between flower stands and grocery stores, relaxing on park benches, and chatting in coffee shops dominate Ishimura's main street. Younger residents often joke that when it rains (prompting the elderly to stay indoors), Ishimura

[10] According to several informants, including two Ishimura's school system, Ishimura's high school is generally seen as an educational "dead end." Students who hope to continue on to college typically attend high school out-of-town.
[11] For a detailed gerontological study of rural Japan and Iwate Prefecture, see Traphagan 2000.
[12] Ishimura Town supplemental population statistics (2012)

becomes a "ghost town" (in English). Though, given the percentage of elderly to young people in Ishimura, it follows that not all have family to take care of them in their old age. Indeed, many senior residents are alone in Ishimura, with family living elsewhere or being nonexistent. According to anecdotal evidence from a number of middle-aged and elderly informants, becoming sick and dying alone is reality for a depressing number of Ishimura residents.

Affective Decline

Ishimura's more apparent economic and demographic declines contribute to a subtler, pervasive affective decline that manifests most viscerally as a town-wide suicide rate that is twice the prefectural average and four times the national average according to the estimation of local officials. I was not initially aware that suicide was an issue in Ishimura. Suicide statistics are not published in local reports, local newspapers do not typically report suicide as a cause of death (even when suicide is apparent), and people generally do not discuss suicide even in candid conversation.[13] I likely would not have heard anything about suicide in Ishimura had I not answered the phone one day while house-sitting for Nakadera temple while the family visited a sick relative. A local government official on the other end requested Daizō's presence at an emergency meeting later that week. When Daizō returned, I relayed the message and asked what the meeting regarded. After a pause, he offered, "suicide" (*jisatsu*). Apparently, fresh statistics

[13] As experienced by Traphagan (2000) and argued by Watanabe et al (1995), Japanese families, fearing for their privacy, are reluctant to reveal information related to suicide. Ishimura officials, respecting the privacy of bereaved families and fearing the potential community anxiety that high suicide statistics could generate, do not publish suicide statistics in the yearly town "databook." Suicide statistics remain confidential, and are only circulated amongst employees of the Health and Welfare Center, officials within the mayor's office, and those directly involved on a consultant basis with combating local suicide rates. I received official statistical information on suicide rates after directly contacting the government office and arranging a meeting with officials to discuss my academic affiliations and the nature of my research. For detailed analyses of suicide in rural Japan, see Watanabe et al 1995 and Traphagan 2004a.

had just been released to government officials and, despite recent efforts to curtail it, the suicide rate had risen again.

As I built trust with my regular informants, I began to ask questions about suicide directly. Why did local residents commit suicide? Why was the suicide rate so high? Some answered, others refused. It was a sensitive subject for many, and I tried to respect the feelings of those who wished to abstain. However, those who chose to answer generally related the impetus for suicide to aspects of economic and demographic decline. Men in their 50's represent on average the highest number of suicides in Ishimura per year. When asked why men in this particular age group would commit suicide, informants typically blamed economic difficulties including failing businesses, extensive debt, and forced retirement. Informants seemed to think that farmers are at the greatest risk of suicide due to the stresses associated with running a farm and the tendency of farms to accumulate unmanageable debt. Suicides were also remarkably prevalent among men and women in their 70's and 80's. According to my informants, elderly people sometimes commit suicide when they become terminally ill in order to end their suffering and lessen the financial and emotional burden on their families. In more intimate conversations, some informants also suggested that elderly people separated from their families and living alone might be committing suicide out of desperation and loneliness.

Local Responses to Decline – Apathy and Hope

Economic, demographic, and affective decline cast a bleak future for Ishimura. For some, this pervasive decay becomes an ambient cacophony of socioeconomic issues that is nonetheless easy to ignore. "*Shikata ga nai*," a number of my informants said, "what can you do?" However, speaking with other citizens, government officials, and local leaders, there seems to be some hope. Ishimura's mayor hopes to impede economic decline by rekindling resident and tourist

interest in local culture. Drawing on the traditional dances (*ōdori*) and handicrafts of the former villages and taking advantage of Ishimura's numerous festivals (as well as adopting a few from neighboring cities), the mayor hopes to attract tourism by offering dance classes to visitors and encouraging them to participate in festival parades down main street. The hope is that interest in Ishimura's culture will attract nostalgic urbanites, eventually translating into increased revenue for local shops, inns, and restaurants. The mayor and his supporters envision a sort of "Ishimura brand" as the town's salvation.

On the demographic front, local government hopes to create incentives for young people to stay in town after high school. Despite attending town meetings and reading local newspapers, most of my informants were not clear exactly how the government planned to accomplish this, although they were aware of the end goal. Inoue, the owner of one of the local coffee shops (his older sister owned the other one, located a block down the street) who occasionally lent me his socks when I participated in outdoor activities, had overheard several people (possibly government officials) discussing plans for a junior college that would teach plumbing and the like to graduates. Inoue was skeptical as to the depth and breadth of appeal this would have for young people with their eyes on Tokyo, but conceded that it was at least worth a shot, granted that it was not too costly.

Finally, several government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and concerned citizen groups have stepped forward to combat affective distress among Ishimura's population. For lonely young farmers, Ishimura's Health and Welfare Center employs a matchmaker to locate potential brides. (Recently, Ishimura has begun outsourcing brides from rural villages in China.) This center also offers information on finances and debt management, as well as counseling for the suicidal and their bereaved families, for new mothers, and for

depressed senior citizens. Concerned with loneliness and depression among the elderly, a small group of active senior citizens has recently started the "Smiling Face Committee," an informal organization aimed at enriching the twilight years of Ishimura residents. Lastly, but most significantly to this thesis, are Ishimura's three Zen Buddhist temples, important religious, social, and *domestic* institutions speaking to lived concerns in their communities.

Community Temples

Before exploring Ishimura's community temples specifically, it is first necessary to address Buddhist institutions as the average resident of a rural community experiences them. Steven Covell defines the intersection of lay and institutional Buddhism, what he calls "Temple Buddhism," as the lived religion of members of Japanese Buddhist schools founded before the 1600's[14] (2005, 4). Mark Rowe develops Covell's "Temple Buddhism" by focusing on the "activities and institutional structures of temples" as they relate to the particular and constantly shifting needs of parish members (2011, 3n, 4n). This thesis follows Rowe's foregrounding of the relationship between temple organization and practices and parish concerns in order to emphasize Buddhism as a "way of life" as it functions within the intersection of lay and institutional practice. I use the term "community temple" to refer to Japanese Buddhist temples, regardless of sectarian identity, that share three characteristics: local contexts, local connections, and local concerns. Community temples exist in an immediate local context that directly influences how these institutions operate. Given their proximity, it follows that community temples have strong connections to local families, businesses, and other institutions. Local residents also predominantly represent the membership of these temples. These local connections naturally encourage community temples to commit the majority of their time and resources to

[14] This includes the Sōtō Zen, Rinzai Zen, Pure Land, True Pure Land, Tendai, Nichiren, and Shingon sects (Rowe 2011, 3n).

local concerns; temple leadership who acted as informants unanimously agreed that temple actions should first and foremost respond to the needs of resident members and their communities. Thus, Nakadera is Ishimura's "community temple" because it is (1) located in Ishimura and operates within the geographic and economic confines of the town, (2) primarily connected to Ishimura residents, businesses, and government organizations, and sustained by local resources, and (3) primarily engaged in addressing the concerns of Ishimura residents. "Community temples" can be distinguished from more widely known and broadly connected "pilgrimage temples," such as Kyoto's famous gold-walled Kinkakuji ("Golden Pavilion Temple"), many of which enjoy broader patronage from domestic and international visitors for religious interest and/or tourism, and often have concerns beyond their immediate localities.

Community temples are also characterized by the importance of multigenerational families to their internal organization and function. The integration of families into a Zen temple is a relatively modern innovation.[15] Although priests of Zen sects had reportedly maintained informal conjugal relationships for centuries, Zen institutions banned formal clerical marriage until the turn of the 20th century. In 1872, in a modernizing effort to make Buddhist priests appear more like the Protestant ministers of the Western nations it sought to imitate, the Japanese Meiji government officially decreed that all Zen Buddhist priests were legally obligated to marry (Jaffe 2001). Zen institutions regained control of their regulations following Japan's adoption of the Postwar Constitution in 1947 through the "freedom of religion" clause in Article 20. However, clerical marriage rates have remained consistently high among modern and contemporary Zen clerics. A survey in 1990 found that 90% of priests from all Buddhist sects were married (2001, 1).

[15] Prior to the 19th century, clerical marriage was convention among Japan's Pure Land and True Pure Land sects.

Clerical marriage and patrilineal succession of temple leadership are now convention among contemporary Japanese Buddhist institutions. Ishimura's three Zen community temples, Kamidera, Shimodera, and Nakadera, are no exception, as a multigenerational family maintains each. The following provides brief biographies of the families at the center of these institutions in order to illumine the familial nature of community temples.

Temple Families in Ishimura

Imagine walking down a long dark hardwood hallway lined by off-white paper doors concealing Spartan rooms with yellowed tatami (thatched grass mat) floors. You turn left and gently slide open a door to a serene garden. Birds chirp while a slow trickle of water gradually collects in a bamboo ornament. The bamboo fills and gently drops under the weight, creating a soft "plunk" followed immediately by a rush of water spilling into a shallow pool. A lazy wind catches the glass wind chime hanging from the eaves. Now imagine the same hardwood hallway, but covered with scuffs and gouges from constant activity and stickers from the head priest's granddaughter. The tatami rooms are filled with electric fans and teacups, amenities intended to make guests comfortable while they wait to plan a funeral. You rush through the room, tripping over someone's laundry, in order to close the antiquated wooden storm doors. It's the rainy season and a huge storm is in the distance. You'll be spending all day tomorrow cleaning up broken branches and trying to locate that bamboo thing that blows away every time there's a strong wind. The wind chime still sounds nice, though.

The above vignettes roughly represent my impressions of daily life at community temples during my first week of fieldwork at Nakadera, and then during my eighth. Understandably, if readers are familiar at all with Buddhist temples in Japan they most likely envision the first example. However, the community temples of Ishimura are far from pristine, sterile places

constructed for the express purpose of introspective contemplation. Ishimura's temples, like community temples in general, are simultaneously religious spaces, social spaces, and domestic spaces. Kamidera, Shimodera, and Nakadera are not only religious institutions, but also community centers and family homes. These spaces are designed and maintained to perform funerals, host community events, and raise children. Community temples combine these functions into a single space, a space designed for and run by actual families. This section examines the families of Ishimura's community temples in order to illumine the family-central dynamics that define these institutions.

Kamidera

Kamidera lies at the end of long driveway lined by stone monuments commemorating substantial member donations. The traditionally crafted, but newly renovated main hall (*hondō*) opens into an immaculate garden that surrounds the imposing building. An expensive looking koi pond snakes around a combination of domestic and exotic shrubbery. There are no fish in the pond; they reportedly died after an elementary school student cleaned his paintbrushes in the murky water during a field trip. The head priest has not had time to replace the fish. A winding path through the garden leads to the expansive graveyard (*ōhaka*) consisting of copious rows of gravestones stretching up the terraced hills that frame the ancient compound. Other than the barking of the head priest's dog, an ill-tempered toy poodle, Kamidera is silent.

Established during the early 1600's, Kamidera, a Sōtō Zen temple located off Main Street in the heart of former Ishimura village, is Ishimura's oldest temple. As a result of its long tenure, Kamidera has amassed a parish (*danka*) of over 1800 member families according to the estimates

of other local temples,[16] making it the largest temple by membership in Ishimura. The large member base provides Kamidera with considerable financial resources, sustaining the large building, garden, and graveyard, while also providing the largesse for extensive interior and exterior renovations over the past five years. Kamidera-san (lit. "Mr. Kamidera," a common colloquial way of addressing and referring to head priests), a surprisingly tall man in his early 50's often clad in either a black robe or gray business suit, drives an upscale SUV, talks on a current-generation smartphone, and keeps time on a gold watch. I am told he is kind and can be quite jovial, although he remained markedly reserved in our encounters.

For all of its size and grandeur, Kamidera is reportedly the least socially active of Ishimura's temples. From my own observation, Kamidera holds a funeral at least a week, often on Saturdays or Sundays. According to several member informants, including Inoue of local coffee shop fame, Kamidera performs relatively few death anniversary services (*kaiki* - these will be discussed in chapter two), typically because Kamidera-san is out-of-town. Kamidera-san reportedly spends a considerable amount of time in Morioka acting as a substitute priest for funerals at a leaderless affiliated Sōtō temple. Kamidera does not have a vice priest, partly because Kamidera-san has no children willing to take the mantle, and partly because he has yet to feel pressured to find a successor (*atotsugi*). Twice divorced and with a daughter that lives elsewhere, Kamidera-san is currently unmarried and lives at Kamidera with only his mother. Rumor has it that Kamidera-san's mother was the impetus behind the divorces due to her stern treatment of her former daughters-in-law and her displeasure at their failure to produce a male heir. Informants consistently described Kamidera's atmosphere (*fuinki*) as "quiet" (*shizuka*),

[16] The actual size of a temple's parish seems to be a somewhat guarded secret. Furthermore, I was told it is impolite to discuss parish size with head priests or temple members, as such comparisons can encourage jealousy and gossip.

"severe" (*kibishii*), and "gloomy" (*gurūmī*), often mentioning the lack of successors and countenance of elderly Ms. Kamidera. Interestingly, however, opinion among members and non-members began to shift toward the end of the summer. Kamidera-san had met a new girlfriend while working in Morioka, one that his mother seemed quite found of. Informants noted that Kamidera appeared to "brighten" (*akarui ni naru*) as a result.

Shimodera

"Be careful about that temple," a regular volunteer at Nakadera told me, "I heard they have Yakuza (gangster) connections!" This was my first introduction to Shimodera, Ishimura's smallest and newest temple. Only 300 years old, Shimodera formed after a dispute within Kamidera's parish prompted a number of families to walk down the street and start their own temple. With only 200 member families, Ishimura's second Soto temple supports itself by operating a combination preschool and daycare in a modern building bordering its small, relatively vacant graveyard. Shimodera's supposed Yakuza involvement stems from the small temple's ability to stay afloat following Japan's post-war economic depression, an event that apparently hit Ishimura's other two temples quite hard. With less than 150 member families at the time to support it, rival priests were nonplussed. When asked if these rumors had any merit, Shimodera-san, admiring a stainless steel sink in Shimodera's newly renovated annex, told me that news of his mafia relations were greatly exaggerated.

Shimodera-san, a well-built, tall man in his early 50's (although he appears younger), is the third-generation Shimodera head priest from his family. Shimodera-san lives with his wife, his father (the former head priest), his high school-aged son, and his border collie. Shimodera-san's oldest son is currently studying at a training temple in order to take over when Shimodera-san retires. Shimodera-san does not mind being a priest (*ōsho-san*), but feels that his position as

principal of Shimodera's preschool is the "best fit" (*besūto fitto*) for his personality. Shimodera-san loves working with children, and is excited for his oldest son to graduate so that he can spend less time in the temple and more time at his preschool.

Shimodera-san describes his hobbies as "drinking, gambling, and vacationing." He is a common sight at the local bars and *pachinko* parlor, and tries to take a skiing trip up north at least once a year. He has visited Las Vegas twice, and is currently planning to visit again after his youngest son enters college. Other priests (and some lay residents) have taken issue with Shimodera-san's behavior, calling his style of recreation unbecoming of a Buddhist priest. However, Shimodera-san "doesn't care" (*kamawanai yo*) what other people think. Shimodera-san defends his behavior on the grounds that he has "freedom" (*jiyū*), that he is "free" to do as he pleases just like any other person. Furthermore, he is careful to use income the temple generates exclusively for supporting the temple, but he believes that the income generated by the preschool belongs to his family. While he reportedly uses this money to first cover any deficits in Shimodera's budget, he then freely spends the rest on home amenities, fashionable clothing, and entertainment. In his priestly duties, he claims to be consistently available for his parish and responsive to their needs. A priest's role is to perform funerals and other rituals that "make people feel better" (*anshin ni naru*). Therefore, in Shimodera-san's opinion, the average person does not care what a priest does outside these ritual contexts. Shimodera-san believes that, if anything, his presence at bars and gambling dens is advantageous; people who see him "having a good time" out and about are in turn more relaxed when they come to his temple. It makes him more "human" (*ningenteki*).

Nakadera

"Nakadera," literally "middle temple," is used colloquially as a nickname by residents of Ishimura to reference the Rinzai Zen temple located between Kamidera and Shimodera on Main Street. "Nakadera" is also useful for remembering Nakadera in comparison with Ishimura's other temples. Established around 1650 CE by a branch of a Rinzai temple in Morioka, Nakadera is the second oldest temple in Ishimura. Serving approximately 1200 member families, Nakadera's parish is more stable that Shimodera's, but smaller than Kamidera's. Nakadera members and leadership described Nakadera as "typical" (*futsū na*) in relation to rural community temples generally regarding architecture, internal organization, and ritual services. However, "typical" carries a normalizing valence that can threaten to erase the "messiness" particular to each of these "lived" and "living" institutions. While Nakadera is certainly informed by logics largely consistent throughout Japanese community temples, Nakadera, like Kamidera and Shimodera, is very much the product of the idiosyncratic frameworks of the individuals who live in and work through these places.

Like many community temples, Nakadera functions simultaneously as a religious institution and as a multi-generational home. Third generation Nakadera head priest Daizō is a soft-spoken man in his early 60's who spends much of his time chain-smoking in his cluttered study, either pondering popular Buddhist writings or composing *kaimyō* (posthumous names) for the recently deceased. Daizō is considered a paragon among priests by many in Ishimura, known for his warm personality and his competent, even-handed handling of Nakadera as a Buddhist institution. In addition to his roles as leader of Nakadera and patriarch of the Nakadera family, Daizō also holds a number of local government positions including (but not limited to) advisor to Ishimura's Health and Welfare Center (a role his father Yuzō also held), president of a

government board addressing rural socio-economic concerns, and parole officer for the local jail (reportedly a common position for rural priests). Daizō's hectic schedule keeps him out of the temple most days, giving him little time to spend with his family and play with his granddaughter Rin.

While Daizō overseas Nakadera as a religious and social institution, Miho, a "lively" (*genki*) woman in her mid 50's and Daizō's wife, manages temple finances, organizes volunteer staff, and oversees the temple as a social and domestic space. Miho was born and raised in Hachinohe, a large city in neighboring Aomori Prefecture. Coincidentally, Miho lived down the street from Daizō's mother and attended the same middle school and high school, albeit over 20 years after Daizō's mother graduated. When looking for a suitable wife to marry her son and manage the temple alongside him, Daizō's mother wanted a girl from Hachinohe because she felt that girls from there, like her, possessed a unique "strength" (*chikara*) and intelligence critical for successfully managing a temple. According to Miho, she gladly accepted the opportunity to marry into a priest family, as it was considered an honor among her natal family and community. Unlike many young daughters-in-law, Miho quickly grew close with her in-laws, particularly Daizō's mother. Miho still carries a fond reverence for Daizō's mother, often calling her "the closest woman to Mother Teresa." She claims to enjoy her professional role at Nakadera, likening it to running a small business. Miho attended college in Tokyo, majoring in business and finance, and sees managing Nakadera as an opportunity to put her skills and knowledge to good use. She spends the majority of the day on the cellphone she keeps in her apron pocket, using it to instantly summon any number of service professionals or volunteers to the temple. Miho also enjoys planning community events through the temple, and wishes Nakadera had the time and manpower to do more.

Daizō and Miho have three adult daughters. The oldest lives and works as a white-collar professional in Tokyo; a second lives with her husband, a government official, in Akita Prefecture; and their youngest, Ayumi (28), a soft-spoken, happy-faced young woman, lives in Ishimura and works as Miho's assistant. According to Miho, Ayumi was the best fit of her daughters for Nakadera's next temple wife (*jitei*) because she is the most "energetic" (*genki*). Like her now deceased mother-in-law, Miho arranged Ayumi's marriage to Tatsu (31), a young priest in training from a priest family at an affiliated Rinzai Zen temple in Fukushima, after the latter expressed interest in becoming Nakadera's vice-priest following Daizō's father's funeral. Ayumi and Tatsu were married a month later, and have been living and working at Nakadera as a couple for the past four years. They have one daughter, Rin (3), and hope to have more children in the near future.

Tatsu, the vice priest of Nakadera, father to Rin, husband of Ayumi, and son-in-law of Daizō and Miho, is without a doubt one of the most difficult people I have ever met. As mentioned in the introduction, Tatsu was the impetus behind my departure from Nakadera. This event, as well as a more thorough description of Tatsu's interpersonal conduct and affect, will be given greater detail in the next chapter. As for now, it is sufficient to say that Tatsu is a caustically irritable, frustratingly capricious, and overwhelmingly selfish individual. That said, Tatsu is also a father, a husband, and a son who, in his own ways, seems to care deeply about those close to him. Tatsu reports to enjoy life in Ishimura and at Nakadera, enjoying the slow pace of the countryside and viewing his career at Nakadera as full of opportunities.

Informants, including members and non-members of Nakadera, consistently describe the temple as "bright" (*akarui*) and "lively" (*genki*), attributes they explicitly linked to the personalities of the family members leading Nakadera. Nakadera is "bright" and "lively" because

the Nakadera family is bright and lively, just as Kamidera is considered "gloomy" because of Kamidera-san's somber attitude. In short, temples are viewed as extensions of the families that head them. Attention is rarely paid to the sectarian affiliation of a temple, or to the degree to which an institution adheres to Buddhist orthodoxy or orthopraxy. In fact, not one of my informants over three months of field research mentioned a temple in relation to belief and practice. Rather, Japanese discuss and relate to community temples as families and family networks.

Community Temples as Domestic Spaces

"Community temples" are those Japanese Buddhist institutions marked by local contexts, local connections, and local concerns in relation to a particular *community*. While this initial description distinguishes community temples from nationally and internationally patronized pilgrimage temples like the Kinkaku-ji Temple in Kyoto, this explanation of "community" ultimately does little to address an easily overlooked, yet fundamental question: to those living within these communities, what is a "temple?" Durkheim understands religious institutions (what he calls "the Church") as communities united by interest in "sacred" things (1995 [1912]). Durkheim defines *sacred* as those things set apart and made special which speak to greater concerns that affect the entire communities. Conversely, *profane* things are mundane and deal with the petty concerns of individuals (Pals 2009, 100). However, extensive empirical research has shown that the Japanese distinction between sacred and profane is hazy at best and generally inconsequential.

Traphagan's (2004) analysis of religious participation within the Japanese home exemplifies this position. The *butsudan,* an in-home Buddhist altar used to venerate deceased family members and ancestors, is *sacred* in the sense that it constitutes a special place within the

home and that it is directed at group concerns. However, *butsudan* still exist as part of, and are marked by, the *profane* home, a space inherently influenced by mundane, individualistic concerns. A *butsudan* sometimes occupies a special alcove in the home, or it can just as easily occupy an empty closet. One family I interviewed used its *butsudan,* in addition to its sacred functions, to replace a missing bookend. Another family used the drawers of a *butsudan* to store foreign money that the local bank could not deposit. When used for religious practice, *butsudan* are often covered with *sacred* offerings of *profane* items like cigarettes, cookies, and cans of beer, items that reflect the living personal preferences of the now deceased.

The example of the *butsudan* demonstrates the ambiguity of distinctions between sacred and profane among Japanese, categories that are largely irrelevant. Rather, the sacredness and profaneness of the *butsudan* is subsumed by its connection to and location within the idiosyncratic family home, a domestic space characterized by individual *and* collective needs and desires. The domestic subjugation of the *butsudan* extends to Japanese religiosity broadly. Therefore, I contend that sacred and profane likewise disintegrate and conflate within the domestic space of the community temple.

Community temples are domestic spaces first and foremost because they are composed of actual families. Indeed, the central leadership of a community temple rests (often exclusively) upon the efforts of the head priest and his (or, very rarely, *her*) family. The head priest serves as the patriarch of both his family and of the temple. He is primarily responsible for performing ritual services, and also serves to steer the temple as an institution. The head priest's wife manages their domestic home while simultaneously managing temple finances, staff, and events. The priest's children may fill a variety of roles as well, with sons often serving as Vice Priests and daughters assisting with temple logistics. In many instances, the temple itself serves as a

domestic living space for the head priest's family, with members living in attached rooms or in a secondary home built on temple property. As a result, the interiors of temples often acquire an interesting (sometimes humorous) juxtaposition of hybrid "sacred" and "profane" space; laundry hangs on clotheslines bisecting graveyards, and videogame systems share shelf space with statues of the Buddha.

Temple membership is also articulated in terms of families, with member families forming the foundation of a temple. Counted in number of families instead of individuals, a community temple parish can have as many as 2000 families, or as few as 10 according to informant estimates. Member families also represent the primary source of income for temples. Parish families pay yearly member fees and offer donations in appreciation for ritual and funerary services. According to the head priest of Nakadera, community temples typically needs at least 200 families to be sustainable. A temple with a parish below this estimate generally has to find alternative means of sustaining itself, be it repurposing temple space in order to operate a school or business (like Shimodera), or by having the head priest or his family members seek outside employment. Although all counted among a temple's regular parish, member families fall into a vague hierarchy based on the nature of their affiliation with the temple. "Old" member families (my term) are distinguished from "new" member families (also my term) in that they have maintained member status for numerous generations, often from the temple's founding. "Old" family members also often hold leadership positions within a temple in which the current heads of these families serve on a temple's various steering committees, or act as leaders for temple-sponsored community groups.

Community temples are also domestic spaces in that priest families and member families behave and relate to each other in ways that resemble traditional Japanese families. For this

reason, it is useful to employ the wealth of research on Japanese kinship structures and processes for understanding the logics that inform and practices that define these domestic institutions. Dorrine Kondo defines Japanese familial networks in terms of *ie* (家) and *uchi* (内), in which *ie* is the family in terms of multigenerational obligation, and *uchi* is the family as a center of emotional attachment (1990, 120). *Ie* are best understood as "corporate groups that hold property in perpetuity," "property" being land, reputation, or the social welfare of a particular group or entity (122). Individuals within the *ie* form personally meaningful, reciprocal connections to the corporate group that in some way benefit the "property" in exchange for benefiting the individual. The impetus behind forming these connections is not necessarily biological relation (121-2), as "family" in this sense applies to any group marked by networks of obligation and reciprocation. In relation to a temple's member families, the priest's family is an *ie* through its duty of daily leading and sustaining the temple.[17] By keeping the temple doors open day-to-day and providing ritual and other services for its members, the priest's family fulfills the expectations of its member families and communities, efforts that are in turn rewarded through member donations in the form of cash, goods, or volunteer hours.[18] This can also be observed in the broader sectarian networks that link same-sect temples in particular prefectures and across Japan. These families of temples facilitate (among other things) the exchange and distribution of

[17] The Buddhist temple "parishioner system" (*danka seido*) has its roots in the government mandated "temple certification system" (*terauke seido*), a means of controlling and eliminating Christian influence in villages during Japan's Tokugawa Period (1600-1868). Tokugawa Period temples used their government affiliation to convince village families to form multigenerational commitments of support to the temples (Rowe 2011, 21-3). This relationship between temple and parishioner became more critical during the Meiji Period (1868-1912) and following World War II when government sponsorship of temples was revoked. Mortuary services for parish families became a key source of income for temples, solidifying the relationship between temples and families (26-8).

[18] For a detailed analysis of how community temples generate income, see Covell 2005 and Rowe 2011.

resources among temples in order to address the needs of particular struggling temples. A sect's headquarters, that sect's head temple, serves as the head of the family and the main node in the network, overseeing and often directing the network's actions toward mutually beneficial goals. These sect-based temple networks have been seen in action most recently following the March 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, where sect headquarters, like the Rinzai Zen head temple in Kyoto, collected donations from affiliated temples nationally in order to direct the funds at same-sect temples in the affected areas.

This system of reciprocal obligation and support seen within community temples and sectarian temple networks reflects the traditional *dōzoku* kinship system Keith Brown observed during his fieldwork in Iwate Prefecture more than four decades ago. Written with characters meaning "same" (*dō*) and "family" (*zoku*),[19] the *dōzoku* system links *honke,* or "main families," to *bunke,* "branch families," in continuous, multigenerational relationships of obligation and reciprocation (1968). The priest's family acts as *honke*, fulfilling its obligation to the *bunke* member families by performing services and maintaining the sacred/social space. Member families perpetuate the *dōzoku* relationship by reciprocating in ways that sustain the temple as a temple and as a family home. The *dōzoku* system is replicated among the temple's parish by different strata of member families. For example, by acting as petty leadership, "old" member families fulfill obligations toward newer member families and toward the temple priests, which in turn reciprocate by acknowledging the "old" families' position within the temple hierarchy.

Uchi, on the other hand, is a "circle of attachment" within a family in which members experience belonging and define themselves "through shaping language, the use of space, and social interaction" (Kondo 1990, 141). *Uchi* are located within *ie,* and denote any in-group (e.g. a

[19] Interestingly, the character read *zoku* (族) can also be translated as "tribe," suggesting broader kinship connections beyond nuclear or multigenerational "family."

nuclear family, a board of directors, a priest's family) within the extended *ie* family network (141). *Uchi* are spheres of cultural and professional learning, places that embody various *habiti* within members. Community temples reflect the *uchi* in this regard, serving to instruct and pass on culturally, socially, and professionally meaningful knowledge. Community temple leadership, particularly priests, fundamentally acts as teachers through institutional roles. While teaching is perhaps most prevalent during the funerary process (something that will be explored in depth in the next chapter), this process is most pronounced in the transitions between head priests. Succession of temple leadership follows a familial pattern, passing through familial connection from father to son (or father to daughter, or father to son-in-law, depending on the nature of the connection between head and vice priest). For example, Nakadera is currently between its third and fourth generation of head priests from the same family lineage. Head Priest Reizō passed control to his son and Vice Priest Yuzō. Yuzō passed control to Daizō, and Daizō will eventually pass control to Tatsu. A head priest mentors his vice priest until he is ready to take over, or until the head priest is unable to continue his duties. During this mentoring period, the head priest instructs his successor not only in proper ritual procedure, but also in the proper conduct relative to that temple's particular community.

In many ways, the domestic nature and familial conditions of Japanese community temples resemble the nature and conditions of Japanese family-run businesses, both in terms of the aforementioned patterns of succession and regarding how they benefit temple functionality. A recent study found that Japanese family-run businesses are generally more profitable than Japanese non-family businesses (Allouche et al, 2008). Profitability was attributed to five advantages family-run businesses generally have over their non-family competitors: (1) reduced divergence between the interests of managers, employees, and shareholders, (2) shared long-term

goals among managers and shareholders, (3) shared systems of values, (4) organizational efficacy of affective bonds, and (5) reduced recourse to debt (2008, 317-8). Family-run community temples, although not considered businesses by temple members or by the families managing them,[20] benefit from the mutual long-term goals, shared value systems, and organizational cohesion of being an actual family unit. Furthermore, multigenerational family succession allows many temples to maintain consistent, stable environments through like-minded leadership. However, as chapter two will demonstrate, just as with family-run businesses, the domestic nature and familial connections that define community temples generate particular vulnerabilities that, when exacerbated by internal dysfunction among the central family, can threaten to collapse the temple from the inside.

Families First

Daizō laughed in his characteristic fashion, rubbing the top of his shaved head and looking down, when I asked him how he reconciled the Buddhist doctrinal call for detachment as a priest with having a family. "That's a funny (*okashii*) question." The mellow priest paused to think, turning a teacup in a clockwise circle. "I suppose it's because Zen is a way of living (*ikikata*)." Daizō explained that Buddhism in general and Zen specifically fundamentally involve discovering a good, moral, and (for others) helpful "way of living." Maybe priests shouldn't have families, he admitted, because families might make life more "painful" (*kurushii*) for some people. However, his "way of living" involves his family, so, for Daizō at least, Buddhism and Buddhist institution are not incompatible with family. Rather, for the temples and priests of Ishimura, and for Nakadera in particular, family is foregrounded.

[20] In fact, "*shobai,*" the term for "business" or "trade," is considered an insult among community temple families. A temple referred to as a *shobai* is thought to be profiteering and taking advantage of its parish, and the family behind that temple is thought to be quite unscrupulous.

This chapter has demonstrated that Japanese Buddhist community temples are fundamentally domestic spaces composed of family networks. These networks define how temples connect to parish families in order to perform services, generate income, and perpetuate temples as religious and social institutions. Furthermore, community temples composed of actual multigenerational families work to manage temples as institutions and as homes. The community temples of Ishimura are no exception, evidenced by the foregrounding of family in informant accounts. However, family does not always benefit a temple and its parish. The following chapter shifts focus in order to closely examine the dysfunction that can occur within a community temple as a result of its domestic nature and family ties. As the failing succession of Nakadera's Tatsu illumines, contention across the familial dynamics that order and perpetuate these domestic institutions can threaten to collapse even a successful, influential community temple like Ishimura's Nakadera.

CHAPTER TWO: A FRAGILE FAMILY

Clifford Geertz's *Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example* (1957), a quote from which this thesis cites early on, offers a fascinating approach to the anthropological study of religion. Addressing what he perceives as a lack of research on the dysfunctional aspects of religious doctrine and practice, Geertz examines the failed funeral of a young boy in Modjokuto, a small town in eastern Central Java. When the deceased's uncle attempts to arrange a customarily expedient local funeral, religious tensions between Islam and Permai manifest as a concrete problem, a delay. Originally intended to conclude by 10:00 am, coinciding with the arrival of the deceased's parents in an attempt to lessen their grief, the funeral, stalled by a disagreement over how to properly prepare and bury the body, drags on past noon and into the evening. The delay causes great distress among the guests and the deceased's relatives. A non-ritual specialist attempts to mend the situation, but his fumbling with the procedure only serves to aggravate the grief of those in attendance, including the recently arrived parents. When all is said and done, the child is buried and the attendees are emotionally exhausted. Geertz uses the failure of the funeral to illumine the cultural, social, and political dynamics that defined Modjokuto narrowly and Java broadly. Geertz writes, "This disrupted funeral was in fact but a microcosm example of the broader conflicts, structural dissolutions, and attempted reintegrations which, in one form or another, are characteristic of contemporary Indonesian society" (146-7). Geertz argues that a foregrounding of religious dysfunction makes this analysis possible, and suggests that further studies be conducted in a similar vein (143).

This thesis echoes Geertz by providing a case study in which a disrupted ritual, in this case the succession of leadership of a Japanese community temple, creates dysfunction within a community. My study focuses on Tatsu, the troubled and troublesome vice priest of Nakadera

Temple. Tatsu is currently in line to inherit Nakadera, both as a Buddhist institution and as a family, from his father-in-law and supervisor Daizō. Tatsu's erratic affect and behavior, his "strangeness" as my informants put it, has caused significant emotional distress among Nakadera family members and temple parishioners. However, the same familial dynamics that have facilitated Tatsu's entry into Nakadera, i.e. family-mediated succession of temple priests, also prevents Nakadera from directly and effectively addressing the dilemma, as firing an employee has become synonymous with disowning a family member. The case of Tatsu and the struggles of Nakadera underscore the potential risks inherent in the family dynamics that define community temples as domestic institutions. In short, my case study reveals Japanese community temples as fragile families.

Strangers in a Strange Land

Tatsu and I shared a commonality in that we were both strangers in Ishimura. While I was a white, foreign, and painfully awkward graduate student on his first research, Tatsu was still adjusting to the changes to his living environment, family life, and career that accompanied his simultaneous marriage and employment into the Nakadera temple family. I first met Tatsu over the phone when I called Nakadera during the spring before my trip in order to arrange a series of interviews for the coming summer. Having consistently been greeted by Miho on previous calls, I was surprised when a man answered. Our first conversation was brief and mundane; Miho was out, Tatsu could take a message, and she would call me back soon. I learned later that this initial interaction was quite significant, neither to Tatsu, nor me, but to Miho. Late in the summer, Miho told me, "I was very surprised when Tatsu gave me your message, because it was surprising that he spoke with you and wasn't upset. He usually gets anxious when he talks to someone like you [planning to visit the temple repeatedly]. I asked him if he was okay, and he

said ‘he seems nice.’ I was so surprised! He’s usually so negative [about visitors].” Miho interpreted Tatsu’s early reaction optimistically; “I thought, ‘maybe he will be okay with this.’” Miho hoped that Tatsu, who normally scorned long-term temple visitors (as Miho had envisioned my presence at the temple), would not only tolerate my existence, but also enjoy the opportunity to talk with someone around his age about his profession, hobbies, and life in general. Miho concluded, “I thought you might become friends (*tomodachi*).”

During the first month of my research, Miho’s optimism seemed well-founded. Tatsu and I struck up an early friendship during my first week facilitated by his interest in practicing English (which he hadn't studied since high school), my interest in his perspective as a young priest, and our relative age (he was 30, and I 25). Tatsu and I also shared a fondness for coffee shops and science fiction films, something that allowed us to occasionally get away from the temple and topics related to his work and my research. However, as time wore on, he became increasingly distant and irritable. I mentioned to Miho early in July that I thought I should maintain some distance from the temple, but Miho insisted that everything was okay. When Tatsu became visibly agitated during an informal interview the following week, I stayed away from the temple for nearly a week, hoping to give Tatsu and the Nakadera family some space, and planned to return to the temple only sporadically afterward. However, my planned absence coincided with a number of special events at Nakadera. Miho wanted my help, and I felt obligated to help her and her family. This was the final straw for Tatsu, who took the opportunity at the end of a long week of events and funerals to demand an (at the time, very strange) ultimatum: either I restrict my activity at the temple exclusively to formal interviews with him and Daizō, or I leave permanently. I tried to explain that my research encompassed the opinions

of many within the temple, but he would have none of it. I left angry and hurt; that was my last day at Nakadera.

I learned later from Miho that the impetus behind Tatsu's anger was not my presence at Nakadera, but my interviewing of other temple members, particularly individuals that he disliked. In fact, while Tatsu was originally against me staying in the temple (which, unknown to me, was Miho's original plan), he told Miho he regretted his initial opinion by my second week.

"Tatsu makes a very good first impression. He's very professional; I mean he is good (*jōzu*) in funerals and [other mortuary] services. However (*shikashi*), he can be difficult (*muzukashii*) if you're around him too much. It's too bad, you know (*zanen desu ne*)?" Yuriko, a regular temple volunteer, told me this early on in my fieldwork. I did not understand what she meant at the time, and thus relegated her telling observation to a nondescript page in my field notes. Looking back through my notes in the days after my exodus from Nakadera, I realized how well this reflection captured my experience with Tatsu. In the weeks that followed, I met with a number of family members, friends, and regular (and former) volunteers who were all to willing to share stories about Tatsu and attempt to explain his behavior. Through these accounts, I came to the conclusion that Yuriko's opinion represented not only her and my own experience, but constituted a pivotal dynamic at the heart of Nakadera.

The following provides a detailed account of Tatsu including elements of his education and upbringing, his relationships to family and temple members, and his perspectives on being an employee and family member of Nakadera. I pay particular attention to Tatsu's complicated, at times fractious, affect and behavior, what my informants called his "strangeness," and the impact of this "strangeness" on Nakadera as a family and as an institution. Through this analysis, I argue that Tatsu, as a "conceptual anomaly" in the familial succession of Nakadera leadership,

represents a fundamental weakness within the domestic structuring of Japanese community temples.

Before moving forward, I find it necessary to address the ethical element hanging over this study of a potentially dislikable person. Over three months in Ishimura, I eventually developed a strong dislike for Tatsu. While getting thrown out of Nakadera (I believe) benefitted my research by disinhibiting my informants, the experience was still painful, and I still carry resentment toward Tatsu. Tatsu became one of the most fascinating aspects of my research, and this is ultimately a research-oriented project. As such, I attempt to show Tatsu as he articulated himself and as others articulated him in formal and informal interviews. In these encounters, Tatsu was neither simply good nor simply bad. He was a complicated individual, and I attempt to provide extensive detail on his affect, behavior, past experiences, and current relationships in order to as fairly as possible portray Tatsu as he once described himself, as a "human" (*ningen*).

Out of Place

Tatsu was born and raised in Fukushima City, the capital of Japan's centrally located Fukushima Prefecture. His parents and grandparents run a small (less than 200 member families) Rinzai Zn temple that has been in his family's care for at least four generations. According to Ayumi, who has visited Tatsu's family temple several times, the atmosphere of the temple is "quiet" and "laid back" (*kiraku*), and there never seem to be many services in a given week. Tatsu has one older brother, who serves as vice priest of his family temple alongside Tatsu's father, and a younger sister who is currently attending university near Fukushima. Interestingly, Tatsu was quite vague about his childhood (in fact, about much of anything regarding his life before college and Nakadera), and much of what I learned about his upbringing I learned through disinhibited conversations with family members in Tatsu's absence. For instance, I learned that

Tatsu has a strained relationship with his family, particularly his older brother and his grandmother. His brother is something of a "golden boy" whose excellence in elementary, college, and priestly education set a high precedent for Tatsu to meet. Tatsu's brother also enjoyed family status as the heir-apparent to the family temple. Tatsu's grandmother reportedly poured her affection on Tatsu's brother, but ignored Tatsu and treated him "like he was unnecessary (*hitsuyō janai*)." Tatsu's parents were largely unmentioned by Nakadera family members, save that Tatsu's father is "very easy going" (befitting his temple), and that Tatsu's mother really enjoys Tatsu and Ayumi bringing Rin to visit, as Rin is her only grandchild.

After high school, Tatsu followed his older brother and moved to Tokyo to attend college. According to Miho, Tatsu initially aimed to attend the same university his brother had, a prestigious, private liberal arts university near the heart of the city. However, Tatsu's performance on his college placement exams was not adequate for admission into his brother's alma mater, and he instead "fell" (*taosu*) to an unspecified mid-tier liberal arts university in Tokyo. Tatsu did not mention this struggle in interviews, and instead focused on his fond memories of being a student in Tokyo. Tatsu majored in philosophy, taking a particular interest in the writings and ideas of Immanuel Kant, and studying Greek mythology on the side. Tatsu also enjoyed working part-time as a barista in a busy coffee shop near his university. Taking and fulfilling a large number of orders gave him the opportunity to interact daily with a large number of people, and the expendable income from this employment enabled him to pursue his other hobby, fashion.

According to Tatsu, he initially had no intention of pursuing Buddhist priesthood. Rather, Tatsu hoped to parlay his interest and fashion and experience with business-oriented human interaction into a career as a buyer and trader of fashionable shoes and clothes. Tatsu eventually

wanted to use the money from this endeavor to open up his own clothing store in downtown Tokyo. However, these plans failed to materialize (unspecified reasons), and Tatsu instead enrolled in a Myōshin Rinzai Zen training temple following graduation in order to become a certified priest. Tatsu's training consisted of hours of daily meditation and the study of *kōan,* thought puzzles designed to cause the thinker to break with traditional logic and experience a glimpse of enlightenment (*satori*).[1] Tatsu found the training temple atmosphere, and particularly the institutional proscription against socializing, stifling, and was glad to graduate after two years.

Following graduation, Tatsu returned home and began serving as the second vice priest of his family temple. This apparently caused some tension within the family, as having multiple vice priests was a luxury accessible for only the largest of community temples. With less than 200 member families, Tatsu was again "unnecessary." Understanding the temporary nature of his position, Tatsu began looking for a temple in need of an assistant and, hopefully, an eventual successor. Tatsu first became aware of Nakadera (and Nakadera aware of Tatsu) when he, along with his father, attended the funeral of Daizō's father, former head priest Yuzō, during the summer of 2007.

[1] In a Rinzai training temple, *Rōshi* (Zen masters) typically confer *kōan* to the student one at a time. Students meditate on the *kōan* for a number of months, and then return to the master to give their answer. The master evaluates the student's answer based on esoteric criteria that is only truly clear to those who mastered Zen practice. If the answer is sufficient, the master confers a new *kōan*. If the answer is lacking, the student is sent back to ponder the *kōan* more, and then return later to offer another answer. This process does not end after graduation from the training temple, as new priests carry their *kōan* with them and return to their master annually to offer answers. This constitutes a form of priestly continuing education. Tatsu is still working on a *kōan* that was given to him two years ago. For the sake of interest, Tatsu's particular *kōan* is, "when you left your house this morning, what foot did you first step out of the door with?" I offered, "the right foot." Tatsu laughed; my answer, based on logic and personal precedent, was insufficient.

Yuzō, as described by his family, members of his temple, other local priests, and even unaffiliated residents of Ishimura, was a paragon of the priesthood and a model human being. Shimodera-san described him as a mentor, a friend, and an "unofficial *Rōshi* (a Zen master)" Much loved and widely respected, attendance for Yuzō's funeral numbered in the hundreds. Head priests from all over Iwate and neighboring prefectures came to pay their respects. Among them was Tatsu's father, who had met Yuzō in some official capacity previously, and Tatsu, who saw the funeral as an opportunity to potentially network with priests looking for assistants. Suffocated by the number of people and flurry of activity, Tatsu took a walk in Nakadera's garden following the main funeral service. According to him, Tatsu was struck by the rustic charm (*miryoku*) of the temple and of Ishimura. Less than three months later, Tatsu would return to Nakadera as Ayumi's husband, Nakadera's vice priest, and the Nakadera family heir apparent.

A Successor and a Home

Nakadera was in the process of trying to find a vice priest and successor long before Yuzō's funeral. As mentioned in the previous chapter, direct patrilineal succession of leadership is the ideal for a community temple. However, the reality of temple succession is complicated. While Daizō had inherited control from Yuzō (functionally before Yuzō's death, and officially afterward) and Yuzō from his father Reizō, only Daizō's case had conformed to the "ideal type" of multigenerational temple succession. Reizō died very early in his career, while Yuzō was still in grade school. Yuzō's "uncle" (in actuality a distant relative of Reizō from one of the "old" Nakadera member families) although not an ordained priest, but who had some training in Rinzai ritual procedure, filled in as Nakadera's unofficial priest until Yuzō was ready to take over. Daizō and Miho, with three daughters and no sons, were in a similarly messy situation.

Temple families unable to practice patrilineal succession, i.e. those without biological sons, instead resort to various forms of adoption-mediated succession. The most common alternative is marrying a daughter to a prospective priest and then legally adopting the son-in-law into the family, with the son-in-law formally taking the temple family's last name and being officially recorded as legitimate heir in the family registry.[2] Adopting a son-in-law is not always the alternative. In an exceedingly rare case, a head priest in Iwate passed the temple to his daughter, making her currently the only female head priest in Iwate prefecture. A priest with no children, or at least no children willing to take the position, can also formally adopt an unrelated young priest (along with his wife, should he be married), maintaining a familial transmission despite the absence of biological relation. According to Miho, head monks of training temples often serve as informal matchmakers connecting temples to newly graduated priests looking for employment.

Formal adoption of a son-in-law and adult adoption of new priests mirrors the alternative succession techniques of contemporary Japanese families, and thus existing studies of Japanese kinship of the potential benefits and drawbacks of adoption are useful for understanding the ramifications of these alternative practices. As Brown (1966) has demonstrated, adoption benefits the family by perpetuating the family name. Simply, it is better to have an adopted successor than none. This is similar to how a temple family views adoption, although the benefits are extended to perpetuating not only the family name, but also the family's multigenerational

[2] In many instances of adult adoption through marriage, it can be very difficult to determine whether a son is actually a son-in-law without prior knowledge (Brown 1966, 1141-2). Family will often not refer to the affinal member as "son-in-law," and adopted children will often use "father" (*ōtōsan*) and "mother" (*ōkasan*) to refer to and speak with their in-laws. Furthermore, family registries (*koseki*) do not reflect in-law status for these individuals. Indeed, had I not known prior through the friend and former professor who had visited Ishimura in the 80's and put me in contact with Nakadera that the Nakadera family consisted of three daughters and no sons, I most likely would not have known that Tatsu was not biologically connected to Nakadera.

tenure of their community temple. However, for both regular families and temple families, adoption is not seen as an ideal alternative, and many families (priest or otherwise) view adoption as inherently problematic. Much of the anxiety surrounding adoption circulates around the reality of bringing an outsider into the family: even with adequate training from an official training temple and solid recommendations from priests or Zen masters, an adopted successor is still largely a stranger to the environment and mores specific to a particular temple. A number of my informants associate Daizō's success at running Nakadera with his native familiarity with Ishimura and, more importantly, with the instruction he received from Yuzō since childhood. In fact, when asked how they would describe Daizō's handling of Nakadera, Miho and many members responded, "like Yuzō (*Yuzō rashii*)." Direct patrilineal succession is seen as affording a degree of control over the consistency with which a temple functions. Adoption thus poses uncertainty for temple families and members as to how the temple will behave following succession to a relatively unknown (and therefore unpredictable) outsider.[3]

Adult adoption also presents problems for the adopted son-in-law, who, despite taking on the family surname and being recognized officially as a legitimate son/heir, still enters the family (temple or otherwise) as a affine and often receives the treatment status of an in-law (Brown 1966, 1143-4). Ethnographic studies often relate the trials of daughters-in-law who labor in service to their husbands' families perpetually trapped at the lowest rung of the family hierarchy (Kondo 1990; Rosenberger 2001; Traphagan 2000). Sons-in-law enter families with a similar status deficit, although Kondo notes that sons-in-law typically receive more "careful" treatment than daughters-in-law (1990, 126). Nevertheless, adopted heirs can still experience a discrepancy

[3] It should be noted that deviation from the biological ideal does not always produce negative results for the member community. If a particularly disliked priest runs a temple, succession by his biological son can represent the unwanted continuation of that priest's legacy. In these instances, adoption of a family outsider can offer the opportunity for much desired change.

between their importance to the family and the actual respect they receive. In the context of a temple family, this discrepancy manifests when a young priest is adopted into the family because a biological son did not want to become a priest, but the biological son persists in or around the family temple/home. An adopted son-in-law is not an actual son, and thus may not wield the same familial influence as a biological son. Although this was not the case at Nakadera, Miho still worried that Tatsu felt jealous when her older daughters' husbands came to visit. Although these husbands were not successors to the family or the temple, they were sons-in-law like Tatsu and were his seniors, both in the sense of age and that they had married daughters senior to Ayumi. Miho feared that Tatsu felt displaced and devalued when her older sons-in-law visited, and attributed Tatsu's erratic behavior during these visits to his anxiety over losing "his special place (*tokubetsu bashō*)" at Nakadera. Interestingly, she later attributed Tatsu's aggression toward me to the same anxiety.

Despite the risks of adoption, and given their lack of alternatives,[4] Daizō and Miho decided to pursue adoption of a family and temple heir through marriage-mediated adoption. Miho had initially wanted her oldest daughter, Hana, to marry a prospective priest, but Hana, like many in her peer group, refused to return to Ishimura after attending university in Tokyo. Instead, she pursued a career in advertising following graduation and married someone of her own choosing, and now currently resides in Tokyo (there are no hard feelings between her and her family). Miho briefly considered her middle daughter, Mariko, but determined that she lacked the energy and assertiveness to properly run a temple. Instead, Miho arranged Mariko's marriage to a mid-level bureaucrat in Akita Prefecture through a matchmaker following Mariko's

[4] It is doubtful that allowing one of Daizō's daughters to succeed as head priest would have been acceptable in the culturally conservative Ishimura. However, a head priest has the final say in who he or she designates as the temple's successor. Had one of his daughters received the proper training to become a Rinzai Zen priest, Daizō could have designated her as successor.

graduation from a Tokyo college. Ayumi became the last resort, although she certainly was not the least equipped. Miho, family friends, and regular volunteers unanimously agree that Ayumi's personality and energy level are ideal for life as a temple wife. Miho's older sister commented that Ayumi has the personality of her father (i.e. calm and kind), and is as energetic (*genki*) as her mother.

Miho sought a husband for Ayumi and a vice priest for Nakadera through a *Rōshi* at a training temple in a neighboring prefecture, a family acquaintance who now served as Nakadera's matchmaker. Miho asked the *Rōshi* to please recommend any eligible and competent young priests. After roughly three months with no word from the *Rōshi*, Miho called him again. The *Rōshi* apologized for not being able to find a suitable candidate, and said he would continue his search. After two more months of silence, Miho contacted the *Rōshi* one last time, only to receive the same apology. Finding a young priest was difficult alone, but finding a young priest willing to permanently relocate to a relatively unknown community temple located in the backwoods of Iwate Prefecture (the "*inaka* of the *inaka*") was even more difficult. Rowe (2011) has noted that rural temples struggle to attract new priests because these young professionals are wary of taking on the financial struggles of institutions in impoverished and depopulated rural areas (19).

Nakadera's search was interrupted by Yuzō's death during the summer of 2007. Yuzō, in his late 80's, came into the kitchen after finishing a morning memorial service. He dozed off while sitting in his usual chair, and stopped breathing sometime before noon. The funeral later that week brought Tatsu and his father to the temple. It was unclear to my informants and me as to who exactly started the conversation about marriage between Daizō, Miho, and Tatsu's father, and how they managed to fit such a conversation in amidst the chaos of Yuzō's funeral, but the

end result was that a tentative deal was struck. Tatsu's father asked him on the ride home if he would be interested in making his future at Nakadera. He was. Miho and Tatsu's mother arranged a meeting of the parents, which Tatsu and Ayumi both attended in order to meet each other for the first time. Following the meeting, Daizō and Miho asked Ayumi if she would be willing to marry Tatsu. She would. A family friend who had served tea at the meeting objected to this; she had the impression from Tatsu's stern demeanor and absolute silence during the conversation between parents that Tatsu, despite his training at a reputable school and his experience being raised in a Rinzai community temple, was not good husband material. Surprisingly, Ayumi dismissed this objection, claiming that in the brief hour she had spent with Tatsu alone, he had been funny and kind. However, she would ultimately trust the opinion of her parents, as they would be leaving the temple in her and her husband's care. Daizō and Miho consulted the *Rōshi*. There is much contention over what the *Rōshi*'s answer was: some family friends insist that he discouraged the union, and others claim that he was either indifferent or avoided the question. All that is certain is that Daizō ultimately deferred to Miho's judgment, and that Miho, with Ayumi's consent, went forward with the arrangement.

Tatsu and Ayumi were married a short three months later with a traditional Buddhist wedding. As Nakadera was lacking room for more people at the time, the couple moved into a small apartment down the street across from the train station. Less than a year later, Tatsu and Ayumi had their daughter, Rin, Daizō and Miho's first grandchild.

When I sat down for a more formal interview with Tatsu in June of 2012, a little more than four years after he had come to live at Nakadera, he spoke fondly of what had become his home. Tatsu appreciates the quiet, laid back atmosphere of Ishimura and the beauty of the forest and mountain scenery. Although he occasionally misses the bustle of city life, Ishimura's bullet

train station makes travel to urban areas affordable and convenient. The proximity of Morioka by car also allows Tatsu to frequently browse the city's clothing boutiques and update his wardrobe. In his rare free time, he enjoys using a small portion of his "good" (*yoi*) salary for buying and selling designer shoes via online auction houses. He also enjoys visiting the local natural hot springs to relieve stress after a busy week, something he rarely did while living in Fukushima and Tokyo. When asked about his integration into his new family, he smiled and responded, "no complaints" (in English). Daizō and Tatsu initially connected through playing acoustic guitar together, a shared hobby. Tatsu reports no tension with his mother-in-law owing to Miho's kindness and empathy, something Miho attributes to also once being a stranger in an unfamiliar family. He describes his home life as "happy" (*ureshii*), and notes that Rin's arrival has contributed to making his experience within the Nakadera family "bright" (*akarui*).

Miho believes that Tatsu genuinely enjoys being a part of the Nakadera family, and that he no longer sees himself as an outsider. In her opinion, Nakadera and its family has offered Tatsu the sense of belonging that he never fully experienced as the second son in his natal family. As vice priest of his own temple, Tatsu is no longer forced to compare himself to his older brother, nor endure the disregard of his grandmother. Tatsu needs Nakadera because he feels Nakadera needs him. Nakadera does need Tatsu, and further I believe it is generally glad to have him. However, my experiences with Tatsu and those of many of my informants revealed in more disinhibited interviews following my expulsions from Nakadera reveal a darker side to his integration into the temple and its family. Tatsu's visions for Nakadera's future and his occasionally erratic affect and interpersonal behavior has generated considerable distress among the Nakadera family and a number of those closely affiliated with the temple.

A Conceptual Anomaly

Informants consistently described Tatsu as "*hen*" (変), a word I translate here as "strange." While other words like *okashii* are also commonly translated as strange, *hen* is significant in that it implies an added layer of deviance. *Hen* appears in words that imply deviation from common conduct or expectations, such as calamity (*henji,* 変事) and pervert (*hentai,* 変態). A phrase used colloquially to describe craziness is *ki ga hen,* "strangeness of spirit." Dorinne Kondo (1990) uses the phrase "*hen na gaijin*" (lit. "strange foreigner), to describe the unnatural presence a foreigner exudes in Japan, a phenomenon she experienced as a Japanese American (11). Kondo describes herself as a "conceptual anomaly," not exactly foreign, but lacking the social and cultural knowledge to appear fully Japanese. In many ways, Tatsu presented a similar anomaly. Informants unanimously agreed that Tatsu was a very capable priest in terms of everyday temple procedure. While Tatsu personally felt that he needed more practice in order to match Daizō's command of sutras and ritual performance, Daizō and Miho agreed that Tatsu is capable of adequately performing all of Nakadera's ceremonial functions. Tatsu looked like a priest, talked like a priest, and, at least in ceremonial contexts, consistently acted as a priest. However, for those who worked closely with Tatsu, he could be erratic, rude, and unapproachable, all traits perceived as unbecoming of an ideal priest.

Tatsu defies the expectations of relatives, close friends, and regular volunteers through his affective and behavioral "strangeness." Following my departure from the temple, informants were quick to comment on Tatsu's strange affect. Informants noted that Tatsu's mood fluctuates radically throughout the day, often transitioning from affable highs to ill-disposed lows. It is not uncommon for Tatsu to arrive at Nakadera in the morning energetic and in good spirits, only to become irritable in the afternoon. While changes in Tatsu's affect can have seemingly no

external stimulus, friends and family believe that these mood swings are triggered and exacerbated by social interaction. After particularly busy days (e.g. a day with several memorial services in addition to a funeral), Tatsu tends to become extremely despondent. In these instances, he often responds by isolating himself in the back room of Nakadera's kitchen, or off-site at his apartment, refusing to participate in any further temple activities for the rest of the day, and occasionally for the remainder of the week. Tatsu's "weaknesses" (as Miho put it) become more pronounced during ritually and socially hectic times of the year. Summer represents a particularly troublesome time, as Nakadera combines multiple summer concerts, a cultural exhibition for visiting American middle school students, and Ōbon (the annual festival of the dead) into a two-month period from July to August. Miho attempts to treat this situation by giving Tatsu multiple two or three day vacations throughout the summer, and by trying to locate additional volunteers so that Tatsu does not feel obligated to participate in organizing special events.

Close friends and family members also consider Tatsu's interpersonal behavior to be particularly "strange." Accompanied by his frequent mood swings, Tatsu is often irritable with regular guests to the temple. Miho stated that Tatsu is able to tolerate visitors when they limit their stay to ritual activities and their presence to spaces designated for religious purposes, e.g. the main hall (*hondō*) and the side guest reception rooms. For those who stray beyond these parameters, such as visiting family members, volunteers working within the temple, and (eventually) myself, Tatsu is quick to grow resentful. Two former volunteers told me that Tatsu used to shoo them out of the kitchen and become verbally exasperated when Miho invited them to stay for lunch. Mariko, Miho's middle daughter, hates visiting her parents and Ayumi at the temple because of how Tatsu makes her and her new husband Keiichi feel. Tatsu glowers at both

from across the kitchen table, and refuses to speak with them unless absolutely necessary. Miho confided with me that during Mariko's last visit (mid July), Ayumi spent most nights consoling her sobbing sister because of rude comments Tatsu had made regarding the length of her stay. Mariko did not bring Keiichi along for fear that two guests would have agitated Tatsu even more. Miho's older sister writes Tatsu off as a brute, and often cites the advice of her many fortunetellers who tell her to avoid the ominous cloud hanging over her sister's temple. Ayumi too has been on the receiving end of Tatsu's wrath, having spent several nights at Nakadera and away from her apartment after getting into a verbal altercation with her husband. A family friend commented to a volunteer one day that Ayumi appears to have gained weight in the past couple years from all the stress, although they conceded that she still wore a "bright" (*akarui*) smile.

While suffering his occasional to frequent abuse, Ayumi, Miho, and Daizō have all come to Tatsu's defense in candid interviews. He has redeeming qualities, although they are often easily overlooked amidst the negative. Ayumi and Miho both stated that Tatsu is capable of being exceptionally kind and generous. Personally, I found Tatsu's interactions with his daughter to be the most telling evidence of his softer side. Tatsu plays with Rin daily, constantly takes pictures of her on his phone (which he shows off regularly), and carries her on his back while he works around the temple in order to lull her to sleep. He enjoys spending his vacation days shopping and visiting parks with his small family. Indeed, according to Miho, Tatsu is rarely "strange" when interacting exclusively with his immediate Nakadera family. However, while Tatsu's career allows him to work closely with his family, it also forces him to work closely with non-family temple leadership.

Although he excels in performing ceremonies, Tatsu struggles in his role as a temple leader. Other temple leadership, particularly the heads of Nakadera's "old" families who serve as

the primary strategic advisors to the priests, considers Tatsu's management style to be "strange." For one, they, along with Daizō, view Tatsu's strategies for increasing temple revenue as too aggressive. In order to address the rampant poverty in Ishimura, Nakadera has recently begun to accept offerings (*ōfuse*) given following ceremonies in kind as an optional alternative to traditional envelopes of cash. For example, poor area farming families who bring a basket of fruit to place on the altar during a memorial service can leave the basket for the temple family (something they would likely do anyway) in lieu of money. Setting prices for temple services is not standard practice for contemporary community temples,[5] and Nakadera has long held a relaxed policy toward collecting revenue from its parish, a stance originating from Reizō's tenure. Yuzō was particularly hesitant to go to the members for money, and Daizō has mimicked his father's approach.[6] Furthermore, Nakadera does not keep very close track of, nor enforce which families pay the yearly membership dues (a fee of around $50 intended to help pay the temple's yearly insurance and home security services). Daizō and Miho are concerned that families that have repeatedly failed to pay may be struggling, and thus do not feel comfortable pursuing delinquent accounts.

Tatsu disagrees with this approach, stating in an interview that the only downside of Nakadera is its unfortunate location in an economically poor area. Tatsu believes that Nakadera should be stricter in its offering policy and more active in fundraising, ultimately working toward renovating the temple's dated interior and funding additional unspecified community projects.

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[5] Rowe 2011, pg 30

[6] Famous among the parish is the following story: during the 1950's, early in Yuzō's career, part of Nakadera's main hall burned in a fire. Ishimura was still recovering from the post-war recession at the time, and Yuzō was concerned about squeezing the community for money. As a result, he raised just enough to replace the unsalvageable wooden beams and roofing. Deeming the burned wall still acceptable, he refused to replace it, and even to buy a paint to cover it up. Half of the walls in Nakadera's main hall still bear scorch marks to this day.

Given the financial difficulties facing many rural temples,[7] Tatsu's ideas for improving Nakadera's funding may have some merit. However, Tatsu's strategies are at odds with Nakadera's traditional passive approach to its community, the precedent set by three generations of head priests. More importantly, Tatsu's approach contends with Daizō's opinion, an insurmountable obstacle.

Tatsu's other attempts to subvert tradition have also met with little success. Poor attendance at temple-sponsored community events is a reoccurring problem for Nakadera. Residents and members that do attend are mostly senior citizens, with few people under the age of 50 ever attending. Tatsu believes that low event attendance and the over-representation of the elderly is due to when the events are held: often on weekdays and late in the day. Tatsu argues that such times are inconvenient for young families as parents often work late and children have to sleep by a reasonable hour for school in the morning on weekdays. Instead, Tatsu wants to accommodate younger families by moving the events to weekends, with morning events being held before noon and evening events before seven. However, the Special Events Committee, run by a cadre of elderly "old" family heads, refuses to change the placement of any event. The committee's reasoning is simple: previous committees have used these times, and it would not be proper to change precedent.

When I arrived at Nakadera during the summer of 2012, Tatsu was embroiled in a bitter debate over the annual early-morning mediation meeting, a three-day event typically held on Monday through Wednesday during which local members and non-members meet to practice meditation before dawn. Although it is one of Nakadera's largest and most publicized annual events, in recent years, attendance has been considerably lower (barely breaking 20 attendees).

[7] Rowe 2011, pg 19

Tatsu wanted to move the event to a Friday through Sunday, arguing that young families would not be able or interested in attending at such an early hour on weekdays. The planning committee, led by one of the most senior "old" family leaders, flatly refused. The event had *always* been held Monday through Wednesday. Who was he to break from tradition? Tatsu was incensed. He was vice priest of the temple; his authority was second only to Daizō. Daizō actually agreed with Tatsu (as did Miho), but not wanting to step on the committee's toes, he stated that he would support whatever the committee decided. The committee held to tradition, and Tatsu became furious, directly chiding a number of senior leadership upon hearing their decision ("strange" behavior in any context). According to Miho, this instance, along with other repeated differences of opinion, have caused deep rifts between Tatsu and other leaders, so much so that Tatsu now rarely attends meetings as a result.

Tatsu's recent distancing from temple leadership has only compounded concerns regarding his strangeness. Tatsu repeatedly fails to restrain his opinion, practice patience and level judgment, and resist acting on impulse, all tropes of Japanese rural priesthood reinforced for the members of Nakadera by the precedent set by Daizō and Yuzō. Miho blames Tatsu's strangeness in part on his social anxiety and emotional idiosyncrasies, and part on an inferiority complex stemming from his (she believed ongoing) rivalry with his older brother. Given the opportunity to exercise authority and responsibility separate of his brother, Tatsu becomes easily flustered when he is stymied, particularly when he feels that his ideas have been rejected out of hand.

In sum, Tatsu continues to present as a conceptual anomaly for the members and family of Nakadera. While he shines in front of the altar and in his private dealings with intimate relations, Tatsu becomes petty and insecure, frustrated and despondent, in the face of

professional adversity. It should be noted, however, that Tatsu does not perceive much of his behavior as strange or deviant. While he has admitted his weaknesses in dealings with others to Miho and Daizō, and indeed has apologized on multiple occasions for exacerbating conflict, he also believes that his policies regarding Nakadera's financial and social activity will ultimately benefit Nakadera more than the old-fashioned, arguably also "strange" policies of the current leadership. Furthermore, I learned from Miho near the end of my research that Tatsu firmly believes offering me an ultimatum was the correct course of action, despite protests from family, friends, and volunteers, due to Nakadera's hectic summer schedule. By Tatsu logic, my form of participant observation (i.e. asking questions while working) would have put unnecessary strain on the volunteers. It would seem that "strangeness" is ultimately in the eye of the beholder. However, despite the subjectivity of Tatsu's strangeness, his presence in the temple as a "conceptual anomaly" has caused tangible repercussions for the interpersonal relations and institutional functionality of Nakadera.

Repercussions for a Fragile Family

Many informants spoke on how Tatsu's affective and behavioral strangeness has deteriorated family and member-to-temple relations. Miho's closest friends, a group of six women who regularly serve as volunteers for temple functions and more domestic needs (e.g. helping Miho and Ayumi sort and donate Rin's old toys), noted that Nakadera's atmosphere has recently seemed less "bright" (*akarui*). As discussed in the previous chapter, my informants tended to perceive the atmosphere (*fuinki*) of a community temple as a direct extension of atmosphere exuded by the family at the center. Miho's friends commented on Miho's stress, Ayumi's frown, and Daizō's silence as elements of Nakadera's collective sigh in response to Tatsu. Miho told me that neither her two older daughters, nor her extended family, feel

welcomed at Nakadera due to Tatsu's reception of them. Miho's older sister confirmed this, saying that although she "loves" (in English) her sister and nieces, she can no longer tolerate Tatsu's rude behavior.[8] Miho also believes that attendance at special temple events, such as their annual "Summer Temple Concert," has decreased due to rumors (*uwasa*) circulating about Tatsu's strangeness. Anecdotal evidence from regular volunteers confirms this decline, although none of my informants directly connected low attendance to Tatsu's attitude, nor knew of anyone who declined the invention specifically because of Tatsu.

Tatsu's four-year tenure at Nakadera has also coincided with a steep decline in regular volunteers. Nakadera, like most community temples, relies heavily on volunteer labor for temple maintenance, daily housekeeping, and preparing for special events. Recently, volunteers have fallen from one to two a day to four or five a month. Miho asserts that Tatsu's rudeness and irritability has scared off potential volunteers and discouraged existing volunteers from returning. Miho's friends, who represent the majority of Nakadera's few remaining regular volunteers (interestingly, even though over half of these friends belong to another temple), had numerous stories of Tatsu becoming irate with a volunteer who overstayed his or her welcome, resulting in a rude comment from Tatsu and the refusal of that volunteer to return. Yuriko admitted to leaving Nakadera in tears on more than one occasion in the first years of Tatsu's tenure, only to return the following week due to loyalty to Miho. After speaking with Miho about the situation, Yuriko (whom I affectionately referred to as *Taichō,* or "chief") has adopted a hardline policy

[8] Miho's sister also attributed her reluctance to spend more time around Tatsu to a weak heart. Sadly, when Miho's sister found that I had been kicked out of Nakadera (she strongly supported my project, believing it would bring attention to hard working women like her sister), she because so upset that she suffered a mild heart attack. This was not her first heart attack, and I believe the episode had more to do with the high stress of her job as a psychologist for the prefectural school system. However, Miho's sister, calling Miho from her hospital bed, exclaimed, "I told you Tatsu was trouble!"

toward Tatsu, actually yelling at him whenever he does something she perceives as rude (I learned that she berated Tatsu harshly for forcing me to leave Nakadera). This has apparently worked for Yuriko, as she seems to be the one regular volunteer Tatsu respects. Yuriko told me once, "Tatsu is actually quite likable if you know how to handle him."

However, few volunteers have the tenacity of Yuriko, and less manpower has resulted in greater strain on Miho and her daughter Ayumi; a 12 to 14 hour workday is not uncommon for them. Nakadera appears in an almost constant state of disarray, with storage rooms piled high with goods intended for donation and hallways cluttered with old documents and flower deliveries. Only the main hall and the adjacent guest rooms, important spaces for ritual ceremonies and meeting guests, are spared from Nakadera's domestic chaos. With more of her time committed to temple upkeep, Miho is also unable to coordinate and host community events as frequently. Miho finds this deeply troubling, as she believes a community temple should offer opportunities for community interaction, especially for lonely senior citizens. Nor has Miho had the time to organize her pet project, a fundraising campaign to buy a communal grave to house the remains of temple members whose families either cannot afford a grave, or who had no family to begin with. Miho feels sorry for those whose remains linger on a shelf in Nakadera's side room (a temporary resting place). There is also some worry that failing to eventually inter these remains (some of which have been in that room since the 1930's) could yield misfortune for Nakadera and its family as a result of the *muenbotoke,* those spirits without living family ties, becoming restless and resentful over their arrested interment (Earhart 1989, 49-50).

The Tatsu dilemma also threatens to tarnish Nakadera's reputation in Ishimura. Member and non-member residents remarked that Nakadera is a paragon among temples, generous with its resources and reliable in its commitments to religious and secular causes alike, a reputation

cultivated by Reizō, Yuzō, and Daizō. Temple leadership is concerned that Tatsu's aggressive proposed financial policies will paint Nakadera as money-centric and "greedy." It is generally important for community temples to not be perceived as interested in money (although, at some level at least, all community temples are), as Buddhism has faced considerable scrutiny in the past decades from the Japanese public for the capitalistic practices of a minority of temples (Covell 2005). Leadership fears that Tatsu will earn Nakadera the derogatory label of "funerary Buddhism," a moniker that implies exploitative temples profiteering from compulsory funerals and other post-mortem rites. Daizō and Miho confided to me privately that Tatsu's treatment of volunteers and other temple guests, his behavioral strangeness, reflects negatively on Nakadera, and that Tatsu will ultimately ruin Nakadera's community standing. Without a strong popular foundation, Daizō and Miho assert that Nakadera will struggle with attracting new families, ultimately threatening the temple's perpetuation.

Finally, Tatsu's affective strangeness generates concern among those closest to the temple, particularly Daizō and Miho, over the stability of the family at the center of Nakadera. While community temples benefit from the cohesion and stability of a family foundation in ways similar to family businesses,[9] the familial structure can also produce vulnerabilities that undermine a temple's functionality. With temple affairs run almost exclusively by the priest's family, the loss of any member through sickness, death, or divorce can have severe consequences. The sudden loss of a priest is particularly dire, and the difficulty in finding a replacement can leave a temple leaderless for decades. Affective distress can pose an equally daunting challenge, particularly when emotional disturbances at the center of a community temple produce interpersonal conflict among its leadership. Daizō and Miho fear that Tatsu could

[9] see Allouche et all 2008

collapse under the weight of his anxiety, ultimately abandoning his responsibilities as a priest and a family member. The loss of Tatsu would spell the breakdown of Nakadera as a temple and as a family.

Hope(less)?

When asked if termination of Tatsu was an option, Miho responded that it was "impossible;" he wasn't an employee; he was "family" (*kazoku*). Firing Tatsu would most likely result in his divorce from Ayumi, irreparably fracturing the family at the center of the temple. While removing Tatsu could salvage Nakadera's reputation in the long run, the affective bonds that define Nakadera's internal structure make the immediate cost too great. Daizō and Miho mitigate their anxiety with hope that Tatsu's affect will mellow over time. Miho believes that the root of Tatsu's problem is a combination of jealousy and loneliness. Miho sees Tatsu's dislike of regular volunteers and relatives lingering around the temple as insecurity; Tatsu worries that these individuals will devalue his role at Nakadera, making him "unnecessary" in the same way he was redundant at his natal temple. As Daizō winds down his involvement with day-to-day temple functions, as he nears retirement and as he begins to pass more control and responsibility to Tatsu, Miho hopes that Tatsu will grow more confident in his value at Nakadera, realizing that nobody can replace him and becoming less jealous of others.

Miho also believes that Tatsu is lonely because he has failed to make any friends outside his family at the temple since coming to Nakadera. Tatsu himself admitted to feeling lonely at times, believing that his position as a priest within Nakadera and within Ishimura naturally distances him from others (something Shimodera-san acknowledges, and attempts to alleviate by drinking and gambling with his parish). Daizō and Miho think that Tatsu will eventually have the opportunity to make friends with other young fathers when Rin enters preschool and

kindergarten. By having peers with whom to vent his frustrations about family and career, Tatsu will be able to connect to other people and relieve a great deal of his stress.

Daizō and Miho believe that Nakadera's eventual success or failure, both as a temple and as a family, is equally possible. However, neither believes they will live long enough to see the full extent of either outcome. Ultimately, Daizō said, "It's up to Tatsu. It's uncontrollable, and it can't be helped" (*shikata ga nai*). Regardless, in her darker moments, Miho struggles under the guilt of bringing Tatsu into the family. Miho sees herself as the root of Nakadera's current troubles. In our last formal interview, she asked me if I thought the Tatsu situation would improve. I told her that I did not know, but that I hoped it would. "It's my fault," Miho replied, "I should have been more careful."

Miho's sentiments reflect the precarious qualities of familial succession within community temples, inherently fragile institutions composed of intimate family networks. The case of Tatsu's succession demonstrates how emotional discord, when coursing across the familial relations that bind temple leadership, can threaten to collapse even a well-respected temple like Nakadera. This dysfunction illumines the interpersonal, family-centric dynamics that define, lend structure to, and often perpetuate community temples. By focusing on the contention surrounding the case of Tatsu, this study also moves to demonstrate these conventions as contentious, potentially disruptive socio-cultural and religious practices that threaten to generate as many problems as they alleviate.

CONCLUSION: COMMUNITY TEMPLES, FRAGILE FAMILIES

Three train stops away from Ishimura is the city of Morioka, the capital of Iwate Prefecture. Once or twice a week, Daizō takes the train to Morioka in order to visit and perform funeral services for the parishioners of Yamaji, a community temple without a head priest. Two years ago, the head priest of Yamaji and his son, Yamaji's vice priest, ran the Rinzai Zen temple as their family had for three or four generations. Then, quite unexpectedly to his father, the vice priest was caught sexually harassing a teacher at the temple's kindergarten. Incensed by this breach of conduct, the parish demanded the head priest fire his son. The parish became more indignant as the head priest wavered, not wanting to cut his son off from his career and his inheritance. In the end, the parish won, and the head priest sacked his son. Roughly six months later, the head priest's wife died in a car accident. Distraught, the head priest turned to alcohol. As his grief and substance abuse intensified, his performance and presence at scheduled services became more erratic. Angry and frustrated, the parish demanded his resignation. When the head priest refused, the parish went over his head to the one authority above the head priest of a community temple, the head priest of the sect's headquarter temple. Leaders within the parish petitioned the head temple in Kyoto for the termination of Yamaji's head priest. Examining the case with the scrutiny befitting such a weighty request, the head priest and his advisors came to a difficult decision. The head priest would be fired.

After over a year, Yamaji is still without a priest or a family. The parish has located a potential replacement, a young second vice priest at a temple in Akita Prefecture, but he seems unwilling to relocate. Although he will never be vice priest of his home temple, his home temple is small and his family is apparently supported by old money, making for an easy lifestyle. According to Daizō, finding a potential priest is extremely difficult in an age when most young

people want office jobs, and most young priests want to be in cities even larger than Morioka. Picking up the pieces of a broken temple, particularly one in Iwate Prefecture, would probably seem like a real hassle (*mendokusai*). As a result, Daizō and a few other Rinzai Zen priests in the area take turns filling in when a member dies. Most of the time, however, Yamaji is silent. No priest chants sutras in its main hall, no children run down its dark hardwood hallways. The once fragile family has shattered.

While the case of Yamaji is extremely rare according to Daizō and other priests with whom I spoke, its sudden collapse and the resulting aftermath does represent a potential "worse case scenario" for community temples overtaken by their own dysfunction. More than likely, Nakadera will never reach the nadir of Yamaji. Tatsu, despite all of his faults, does not seem *that* destructive. However, the destruction of a community temple can be a gradual process in which minor tensions eventually amount to a total collapse. Ultimately, Nakadera, like all community temples similarly afflicted by internal dysfunction, falls into a continuum of decay controlled, at least in part, by the family at the temple's center. Tatsu, held in place by his familial connections to Nakadera, wields the greatest control over whether Nakadera will continue to decline, stagnate, or reverse direction toward a brighter future.

This thesis has approached Japanese community temples as domestic places composed of interlocking family networks in which the priest's family acts as the central node. As the case of Tatsu and Nakadera demonstrates, interpersonal conflict within temple leadership can threaten to recast these institutions as dysfunctional families that foster mutually destructive relationships in which temple and parish fail to provide for one another. Tatsu's emotional and behavioral "strangeness" has deteriorated relations among temple leadership, between the temple and its parish, and, most importantly, within the family at Nakadera's center. However, the family-

mediated process of patrilineal temple succession that integrated Tatsu into Nakadera also prevents him from being removed. The familial conventions that inform Nakadera as a social, religious, and fundamentally domestic institution cast Tatsu as both *employee* and *kin*, as the successor to Nakadera as both an institution and a family. To fire Tatsu would be to disown him, and to shatter a real family in the process of saving an imagined one. I contend that the negative example of Tatsu both illumines the messy, affective, and interpersonal dynamics that define community temples as inherently domestic institutions, and also underscores the contention and risk inherent in that nature. In short, Tatsu reveals Japanese community temples as inherently fragile, and very real families.

Finally, given the use I make of him in this study, I feel I should give Tatsu the last word. Despite our confrontations, I feel Tatsu, for all of his problems, genuinely has what he views as Nakadera's best interests at heart. One day, while we were rearranging floor cushions in the main hall for a funeral, I asked Tatsu if performing a funeral was emotionally difficult. "It can be," he replied, "especially if its for a child or someone who died suddenly." I asked him if it was acceptable for priests to cry during a funeral. He said it was unprofessional to weep, but quiet tears were sometimes to be expected. I asked him if he ever cried. "Sometimes," he answered, "but I try not to. I don't want to make the family feel worse." "However," he added, "sometimes I can't help it. Priests are human, after all. I'm human."

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Vita

Aaron Christopher Delgaty was born in Holland, Michigan. After completing his work at Grand Haven High School in Grand Haven, Michigan in 2005, he entered Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He spent the summer of 2007 as an intern in Hikone, Shiga Prefecture, Japan. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Japanese and Chinese Language from Calvin College in May 2009. He entered the M.A. program in Asian Cultures and Languages at the University of Texas at Austin in 2010, spending the summer of 2012 in Iwate Prefecture for fieldwork, and graduating in May 2013.

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